

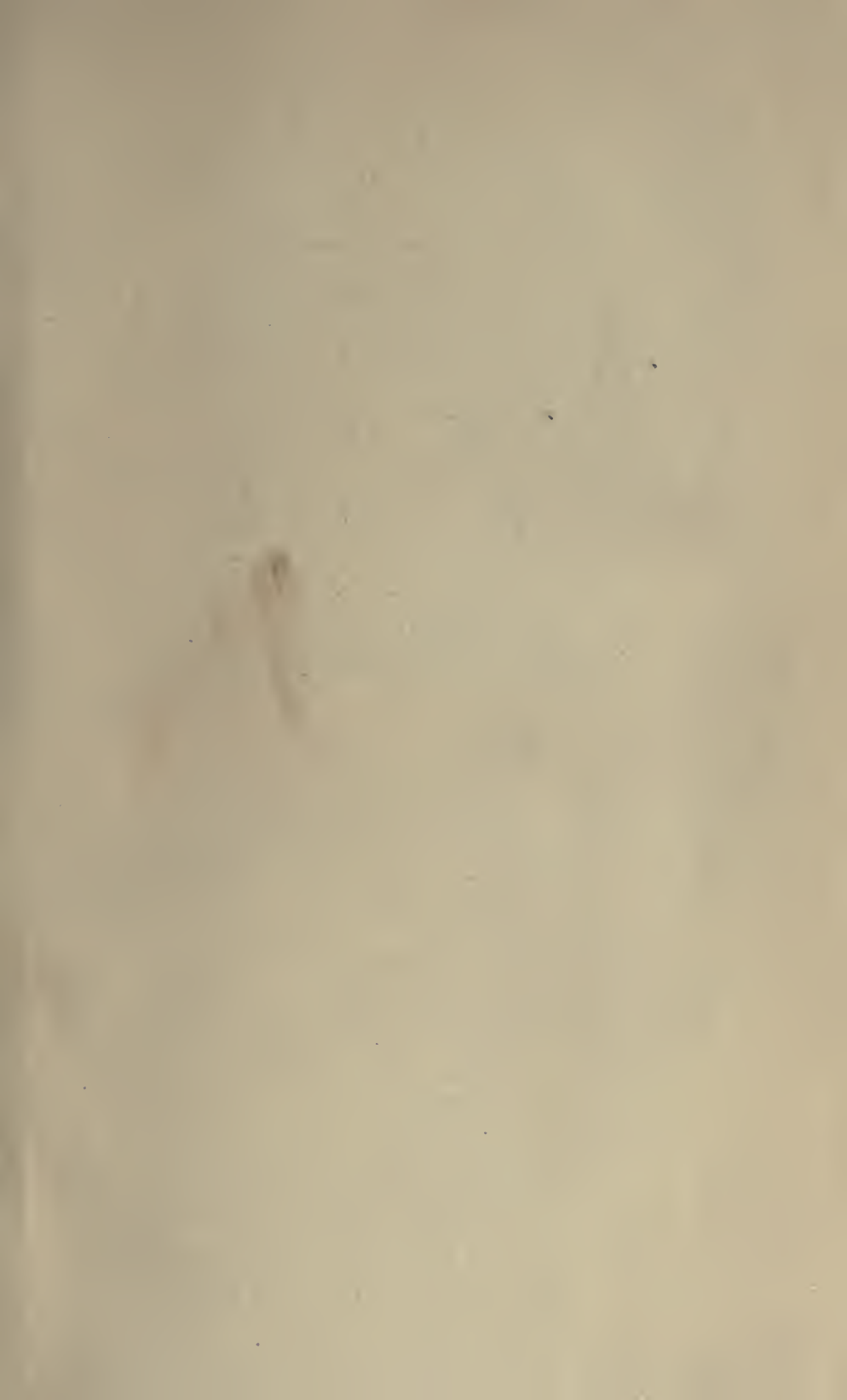




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A COLONIAL REFORMER



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COLONIAL REFORMER

BY

ROLF BOLDREWOOD

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'ROBBERY UNDER ARMS,' 'THE SQUATTER'S DREAM,'
'THE MINER'S RIGHT,' ETC.

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CHAPTER I

WHEN Mr. Ernest-Neuchamp, younger, of Neuchampstead, Bucks, quitted the ancient roof-tree of his race, for a deliberate conflict with fortune, in a far land, he carried with him a purpose which went far to neutralise doubt and depression.

A crusader rather than a colonist, his lofty aims embraced far more than the ordinary sordid struggle with unkind nature, with reluctant success. Such might be befitting aspirations for eager and rude adventurers, half speculators, half buccaneers. They might fitly strive and drive—bargain and save—gamble, overreach, overwork themselves and one another, as he doubted not all colonists did in their proverbially hurried, feverish lives. But for a Neuchamp, of Neuchampstead, was reserved more chivalric exertion—a loftier destiny. As his ancestors had devoted themselves (with more energy than discretion, said tradition) to the refinement and elevation of the Anglo-Saxons—when first the banner of Tancred of Neuchamp floated over the Buckinghamshire meadows,—so would his lineal descendant diffuse ‘sweetness and light’ among a vigorous but necessarily uncultured community, emerging from his unselfish toil, after a few years, with a modest competency, and the reputation of an Australian Manco Capac of the south.

Ernest Neuchamp fully endorsed the dictum that ‘colonisation was heroic work.’ He superadded to this assent a conviction that he was among the heroes destined to leave a glorious memory in the annals of the colony which he intended to honour.

For the somewhat exceptional though not obsolete character of reformer, he was fitted by natural tendency, derived probably from hereditary predisposition. The Neuchamps had always been leading and staunch reformers, from a period whence ‘the memory of man goeth not to the contrary.’ Of Merrie England they would have secured a much larger slice had they not been, after Hastings, more deeply concerned in inflicting reforms upon the stubborn or despondent Saxons than in hunting after manorial privileges with a view to extension of territory. Even in Normandy, old chroniclers averred that Balder-Ragnaiök,

nicknamed Wünsche (or the wisher), who married the heiress of Neuchamp, and founded the family, converted a fair estate into a facsimile of a Norse grazing farm, maddening the peasantry, and strengthening his natural enemies by an everlasting tutelage as exasperating towards others as fascinating to himself.

Mr. Courtenay Neuchamp, who inherited, in happier times, the ancestral hall, in Buckinghamshire, was an easy-going man of the world, combining a shrewd outlook upon his own affairs with the most perfect indifference as to how his neighbours managed theirs. He was a better man of business than Ernest, though he had not a tittle of his energy or fiery abstract zeal. So far from giving credit to his ancestors, and their spirited efforts, he bewailed their misdirected energies.

'They were a lot of narrow-minded busybodies,' he would often remark, 'incapable of managing their own affairs with decent success, and what little power they ever possessed they devoted to the annoyance of their neighbours, people probably much wiser than themselves.'

'They had noble aims, to which they gave their lives,' Ernest would reply; 'I reverence their memories deeply, fervently, more—a hundredfold—than if they had left us the largest manor in the county, amassed by greed and selfishness.'

'So don't I; nothing can be more disgraceful than to see the representatives of the oldest family in the shire (for these Tudors are of yesterday) possessed only of an estate of less acreage than a tenant-farmer tills, with an inconvenient old rookery, hardly good enough for the said tenant-farmer to live in. I wish I had lived a few centuries earlier.'

'You would have enlarged our borders,' said the younger son, 'but at what a cost! We boast a long roll of stainless ancestors, each of whom was true to his God, to his king, to his plighted word, and who called no man his master, save his anointed sovereign. You would have been cursed with an unhappy posterity of spendthrifts, profligates, oppressors of the poor or trucklers to the rich.'

'Gra' mercy! as we used to say, for thy prophecies and predictions. I see no necessity for vice being necessarily allied to success in life. I believe sometimes it is rather the other way. But you were always headstrong; slave to imagination, that misleader of humanity. Go on your own path, and you may convert all the Papuans, Australians, New Zealanders, or whatever they are, that you are going to waste your life among, if you have sufficient breathing time before you are roasted.'

'I am going to New South Wales, in Australia, where they don't roast people any more than in Bucks. But you will never read up on any subject.'

'Why the deuce should I?' demanded the senior. 'What earthly benefit can I derive from the manners and customs of

foreign savages. We have them of our own and to spare. If thereby I could persuade these pig-headed tenants of ours to farm in a more enlightened way, and pay interest on capital advanced for *their* benefit, or learn how to get old Sir Giles Windereach to sell us back that corner his father bought of Slacklyne Neuchamp, I wouldn't mind. Why else should I read beastly dry books?

'Because you would learn to take an interest in your kind, and might then propose to yourself the healthful task of trying to improve them.'

'But,' said Courtenay, rather disrespectfully, 'why should I improve those classes, from which as a landowner and very minor capitalist, I find it hard enough to defend my property as it is? Go and test a grocer in arithmetic, you will find him the more accurate man, and the readier. Try a labourer at his own cart, and see how he is at once your superior. Depend upon it, all this upheaval of lower social strata is bad. Some day we may find that we have freed internal fires and exploded social volcanoes.'

'I shall make the attempt where I am going, however,' said Ernest with decision. 'It may be that there are peculiar advantages in a new land, and a sparse population, without the crushing vested interests which weigh one to the dust in the old world.'

'Perhaps you may gather some of the dust of the new, which is gold, they say, if they don't lie, as most probably they do. Then you can rear an Australian Neuchampstead, which will be the third, under such conditions, built by our family, if old records are true. I wish you were taking more capital with you, old fellow, though.'

Here the elder man slightly relaxed the cold undemonstrative regard which his aquiline features usually wore, as he gazed for a few moments upon the ardent expressive face of the cadet of his house. 'It's another of the family faults that we can neither stay decently together at home, nor fit out our knights-errant worthily for the crusade.'

'My dear Courtenay,' said the younger son, touched to the depth of a delicate and sensitive nature by the rare concession of the head of the house, 'things are best as they are. You have enough which you require. I have not enough, which is an equal necessity of my nature. I should die here like a falcon in a corn-chandler's shop, pining for the sweep of her long wings against the sea-cliff, where with wave and tempest she could scream in concert. Hope and adventure are my life, the breath of my nostrils, and forth I must go.'

'Well, my blessing go with you, Ernest; I neither mistrust your courage nor capacity, and in any land you will probably hold your own. But I should have more confidence in your success if you had less of that infernal Neuchamp taste for managing other people's affairs.'

‘But, my dear Courtenay, is it not the part of a true knight and a Christian man to lead others into the right path? We thankfully accept it from others. I think of the many needs of a new land, and of the rude dwellers therein.’

‘I hate to be put right—colonists may be of the same opinion. *You* never can be induced to do anything that is suggested by another, or any Neuchamp, that I ever heard of.’

‘Because we take particular care to be identified with the latest, and most successful practice in all respects.’

‘Because we are always right, I suppose. A comfortable theory, but of which the public cannot always be convinced. I never try to convince them—I merely wish to be left alone. That is where I differ from you.’

‘You will never gain, however, by your principles, Courtenay.’

‘You will lose your fortune by following out yours, Ernest.’

The conversation having ended, as had nearly all previous discussions between the brothers, in each adhering steadfastly to his own opinion, Ernest went his own way with the cheerful obstinacy of his character. He selected a ship and a colony. He ordered a large, comprehensive, and comparatively useless outfit. He purchased several books of fact and fiction, bearing upon the land of his adoption, for reading upon the voyage, and girding himself up, he finally completed all necessary arrangements. He bade farewell to the old home—to the villagers, whom he had known from boyhood—and to his friends and kinsfolk. He did then actually set sail in the clipper-ship *St. Swithin*, comforting himself with heroic parallels of all ages and all shades of maritime adventure.

On the voyage out, he made acquaintance with several agreeable people. Of these, many were, like himself, sailing to Australia for the first time. Others were returning to the great south land, where they had probably spent their early years, or indeed been born. Among these, though he was not aware of the fact, since they did not advertise it, was a family named Middleton, consisting of a father, mother, and two daughters. These last were quiet and well-mannered, but decidedly amusing. Alice Middleton was handsome and lively; Barbara was rather staid, given to reading, and did not talk much, except with congenial people. She, however, could speak very much to the point, should such speaking be needed. With this family Mr. Neuchamp became on sufficiently intimate terms to confide his views upon colonial life, including his hopes of benefiting the citizens of his adopted country by the inculcation of the newest English ideas in farming and other important subjects. He did not find that readiness of response which he had looked for. This puzzled and slightly annoyed him, as from their intelligent sympathy in other matters he had confidently reckoned upon their co-operation. Indeed he had

discovered the second Miss Middleton in the act of smiling, as if at his enthusiasm ; while the matron, a shrewd, observant person, went the length of inquiring whether he did not think it would be better to see something of the country, before settling the affairs of its inhabitants.

‘My dear Mrs. Middleton,’ replied Mr. Neuchamp with grave dissent, ‘I regret that I cannot see the force of your position. My feeling is that one is far more certain to criticise fairly and dispassionately a new land and a new state of society, while one’s impressions are sharply and freshly defined. Afterwards, the finer lines are effaced by use, wont, and local prejudice. No! depend upon it, the newly-arrived observer has many advantages.’

‘Then you do not think it possible,’ said Alice Middleton, ‘that the new—arrival should make any mistakes in his inspection of the unlucky colonists?’

‘If he has cultivated his power of observation, and his critical faculty, so that he can trust himself to be just and impartial, I do not see that it matters whether he may have lived one year or ten in any given country.’

‘You will find that it *does* matter,’ retorted his fair antagonist, ‘unless you are different from every other Englishman we have ever seen.’

‘Why, have *you* lived in Australia?’ inquired he with accents of extreme surprise. ‘I had no idea of the fact.’

‘We have been there all our lives,’ said Barbara Middleton, ‘excepting for the last three years. Why should you think we had not been there?’

‘I—really—don’t know,’ protested Mr. Neuchamp, now discovering suddenly that he was on unsafe ground. ‘I thought you were English, and making the voyage, like myself, for the first time.’

‘Don’t apologise,’ laughed Alice; ‘you may as well say at once that you thought we were too much like ordinary English people to be colonists,’ and she made him a slight bow.

‘Well, so I did,’ confessed our hero, too honest to evade the expression of his opinions. ‘But you know, you’re so—well—you do expect a little difference in appearance, or manner——’

‘Or complexion?’ continued his fair tormentor. ‘Did you think Australians were—just a little—dark?’

‘I recant, and apologise, and sue for pardon,’ said Ernest, now completely dislodged from his pedestal, a horrid thought obtruding itself that similar discoveries would narrow his mission to most uninteresting dimensions.

This ‘check to his queen’ sobered Mr. Neuchamp for several days. He began to question the probability of influencing society in Australia to any great extent, if the component parts were like the Middleton family. However, he reflected that people of cultivated tastes and unexceptionable manners

were rare in any country. And when he thought of the vast interior with its scattered untravelled population, hope revived and he again saw himself the 'guide, philosopher, and friend of a guileless and grateful people.'

There were several landed proprietors who held great possessions in Australia among the passengers, with whom he made a point of conversing whenever such conversation was possible. But here again unexpected hindrances and obstacles arose.

Mr. Neuchamp found that these returning Australians were rather reserved, and had very little to say about the land in which so large a portion of their lives had been passed. They committed themselves to the extent of stating in answer to his numerous inquiries, that it was a 'very fair sort of place—you could manage to live there.' 'As to the people?' 'Well, they were much like people everywhere else—some good, some bad.' 'Climate?' 'Hot in some places, cold in others.' 'Manners?' 'Well, many of the inhabitants hadn't any, but that was a complaint almost universal at the present day.' The oppressed colonist generally wound up by stating that when he, Neuchamp, had been in Australia for a year or two, he would know all about it.

All this was very unsatisfactory. As far as these pieces of evidence went, the *terra incognita* to which, after such rending of ancient associations and family ties, he was even now voyaging, was as prosaic as Middlesex or Kent. These people either did not know anything about their own country or their own people, or, with the absurd indifferentism of Englishmen, did not care. He was partly reassured by one of the more youthful passengers, who had not been very long away from his Australian birthland. He considerably raised Ernest's spirits, and his estimate of Australia as a 'wonderland,' by certain historiettes and tales of adventure by flood and field. But when he introduced Indians, habitual scalping, and a serpent fifty feet long, Mr. Neuchamp's course of reading enabled him to detect the unprincipled fabrication, and to withdraw with dignity.

In due course of time, the vessel which carried Mr. Neuchamp and his purpose arrived at her destination. The night was misty, so that he had no opportunity of comparing the harbour of Sydney with the numerous descriptions which he had read. He was met on the wharf by the perfectly British inquiry of 'Cab, sir, cab?' upon replying to which in the affirmative, he was rattled up to the Royal Hotel, and charged double fare, with a completeness and despatch upon which even a Shore-ditch Station cabby could not have improved.

Having renovated himself with a bath and breakfast, Mr. Neuchamp proceeded to view the component parts of the busy street from the balcony of the great caravanseraï. On the whole, he did not see any striking departure from the appearance

of an ordinary London thoroughfare. There were omnibuses raking the whole length of the street, fore and aft, as it were, well horsed with upstanding powerful animals; the drivers, too, had something of the misanthropical air which the true 'busman always acquires after a certain period. Hansoms rattled about, with the express-train flavour peculiar to that luxurious vehicle for the unencumbered. Well-appointed carriages, from which descended fashionably attired dames and damsels, drew up at imposing haberdashers for a little early and quiet shopping. The foot passengers did not look as if they were likely to contribute to any Arabian Nights entertainment either. They wore chiefly black coats, I grieve to say black hats, and serious countenances, exactly like the mercantile and legal sections of the city men in London. The labourers wore the same shoddy suits, the sailors the same loose or inexplicable tightened garments, the postmen the same red coat, the shabby-genteel people the same threadbare ditto; even the blind man, with a barrel-organ, had the same reflectorial expression that he had often noticed. All the types were identical with those he had hoped to have left ten thousand miles away. Certainly he did see occasionally a sauntering squatter, bronzed, bearded, and *insouciant*; but he, again, was so near akin to a country gentleman who had taken a run to town, or a stray soldier on leave, that he was upon the point of exclaiming, 'How disgustingly English!' when a slight incident turned his thoughts to the far and wondrous interior. Down the street, on a grand-looking young horse, at a pace more suggestive of stretching out through endless forest-parks than of riding with propriety through a narrow and crowded thoroughfare, came a born bushman. He was a tall man, wearing a wide-leaved felt hat and a careless rig generally, such as suggested to Mr. Neuchamp the denizen of the waste, whom he had hungered and thirsted to see. Here he was in the flesh evidently, and Ernest drank in with greedy eyes his swarthy complexion, his erect yet easy seat on his horse. However, just as he was passing the hotel, whether the gallant nomad was looking another way, or whether he had considered the hour, early as it was, not unsuitable for refreshment, the fact must here be stated that the colt, observing some triumph of civilisation for the first time (a human advertising sandwich), stopped with deathlike suddenness; his rider was shot on to the crown of his head with startling force. Mr. Neuchamp was preparing to rush downstairs to the rescue, when a quietly attired passer-by stepped up to the snorting colt and, with a gentle adroitness that told of use and wont, secured and soothed him. The gallant bushman arose, looking half-stunned; then, gazing ruefully at the crown of his sombrero, he felt the top of his head somewhat distrustfully, and with a word of thanks to the stranger, who held the rein in a peculiar manner till he was safe in the saddle, mounted and pursued his way after a swift but guarded fashion.

‘My word, sir,’ was his single remark, ‘I didn’t think he’d ha’ propped like that—thank *you* all the same.’

Inspired by this incident as showing a possibility of lights and shadows even upon this too English foreground, Mr. Neuchamp thought that he would deliver one of his letters of introduction to a merchant, whose advice he had been specially recommended to take in the purchase of land, or of whatever property he should select for investment.

CHAPTER II

WHEN the past is reviewed, and the clear sad lamp of experience sheds its soft gleam upon the devious track, then are all apparent the scarce shunned precipices, the hidden pitfalls, the bones of long dead victims. Then can we measure the tender patience with which our guardian angel warned or wooed into safety.

Here, where we loitered all heedless, flower-crowned, and wine-flushed, languished the serpent syren, heavenly fair, but deadliest of all. We had been surely sped. But an idle impulse, the tone of a passing melody, led to change of purpose, of route, and we stood scatheless anon, having tripped lightly among deaths as sudden and shattering as the lighted explosive.

At the diverging roads, where dumb and scornful sat the sphinx of our destiny, while we lightly glanced at the path whence none return, save in such guise that death were dearer, why did our heedless footsteps cling all instinctively to the narrow, the thrice blessed way?

And yet again, in the dark hour when we should have been watchful as the mariner on an unknown shore, who casts the lead over every foot of the passage through which his barque seems so easily gliding, how was our careless pride brought low, how sudden was the sorrow, how dreary the bondage, till we were ransomed from the dungeon of the pitiless one. From what endless weeping would not, alas, a dim knowledge and recognition of the *first false step* have saved us!

Such a false step Mr. Neuchamp was nigh upon adopting, with all its train of evil consequences. At the mid-day *table d'hôte* at the Royal Hotel, sufficiently welcome to him after the weary main, sat a florid, good-looking, smiling, middle-aged man, evidently a gentleman, and not less surely connected with the country division. He happened, apparently by chance, to be seated next to Ernest, who was immediately attracted by his bonhomie, his humorous epigrammatic talk, joined to the outward signs and tokens of the man of the world.

'You have not been very long in this part of the country?' said the agreeable stranger.

Ernest slightly coloured as he replied, 'I certainly have not; but I confess I don't see why I should be *affiché* as a new and inexperienced traveller. You and I are dressed much alike, after all,' added he, glancing at the other's well-cut travelling suit of rough tweed and the black hat which hung beside his own upon the pegs provided for lunch-consuming visitors.

'True, quite true,' agreed his new acquaintance; 'and it is not, perhaps, good manners to remark upon a gentleman as a species of foreign novelty. I remember a few years since chafing at it myself. But my heart warms to an Englishman of a certain sort. And we Australians learn to know the Britisher by all manner of slight signs, including a fresh complexion. I really believe, if you will pardon my rudeness in guessing, that you come from near my own county?'

Ernest explained the locality of Neuchampstead, upon which the affable stranger rose and shook him violently with both hands, exclaiming, 'I could have sworn it. Our people have been friends for ages. I come from just over the border. You've heard of the Selmores of Saleham?' mentioning county people well known by name to Ernest.

'Now this is very delightful,' said his new friend, after all explanations had been made, 'and I shall take charge of you without any scruple. You had better change your quarters to the New Holland Club. I can have you admitted as an honorary member without a day's delay. I am a member; but I came here to-day to meet a friend, and have done so most unexpectedly, eh, my dear Neuchamp?'

So irresistible was Mr. Selmore, that Ernest felt absolutely carried away by the stream of his decided manner, his good stories, his pleasant sarcasms, his foreign reminiscences, and his racy description of Australian bush-life (he owned several stations, it would seem, himself). So it was natural that after a bottle of hock, of a rare vintage, ordered in honour of their auspicious meeting, that he should confide to Mr. Selmore his plans of life, his leading ideas, and the amount of capital which he was free to invest in some description of landed property.

After they had compressed more droll, confidential, and semi-practical talk into a couple of hours than would have served for a week on board ship, Mr. Selmore proposed a stroll down the street towards the public gardens, which he thought his young friend would find novel and interesting.

As they lounged down the principal street Ernest was struck with the change in the appearance of the crowd which thronged one side of the footway, between the bisecting cross-streets. The hard and anxious faces of the world's workers which had filled the pavement in the morning had vanished, and in their stead were the flowerets of fashion, the gilded youth of the land, the butterflies of society, the fair faces of daintily attired girls, the unworn features of those ornamented human types

which comprise no toilers, whatever may be the proportion of spinsters.

Mr. Neuchamp, whose sensitive organisation was still more highly attuned by the voyage, gazed with much interest upon this novel presentment. Again he could not help asking himself, 'Have I really left Britain? Is this a colony, or a magically sliced-off section of London life? The swells are identical to the turn of a moustache, or the set of a collar. That girl's bonnet has not been two months from Paris, for I saw the fellow of it, which had only that day arrived, on Cousin Amy's head the week I left home. Allah is great! Have I come to reform these people? However, this is only the city. All cities are alike, except, perhaps, Tangiers and Philadelphia. Wait till I get fairly into the bush!'

Thus, looking with pleased eyes and wondering mind, Mr. Neuchamp hardly noticed that his companion, as he swaggered easily along, seemed to know and be known of every one. He, however, did not care to stop to speak to his numerous friends. As they passed on, some of them, Ernest commenced to observe, regarded Mr. Selmore and himself with an amused expression. Keenly alive to colonial criticism, though proposing to pour so many vials of the British article upon the heads of these unsuspecting Arcadians, he noted more closely the manner and bearing of the still undiminished number of the 'friends of his friend' whom they encountered. It might have been fancy, but he thought that he saw a keen glance, in some instances not altogether of mirth, bestowed upon himself.

They had reached a side street, along which they passed, when three young men, irreproachably attired for the ante-prandial stroll, blocked the way.

'Where are you off to in such a hurry, you old humbug?' said a tall handsome man imperiously. 'You *can't* have any business at this time of day.'

'Not so sure of that,' chimed in another of the party. '*I see you've got your black hat with you, Selmore.*'

Mr. Selmore looked straight into the speaker's eyes for a moment, and then gravely taking off the upper covering referred to, stroked it, looked at it, and replaced it upon his head.

'Yes!' he said, 'Evelyn, I have; I prefer them, even in this confounded weather. They make a fellow look like a gentleman if it's in him, and not like a man going to a dog-fight, like that white abomination you have on.'

The trio laughed more heartily and continuously at this rejoinder than Ernest thought the wit justified, to the enjoyment of which Mr. Selmore abandoned them without ceremony, merely remarking to Ernest, though good fellows, they were awfully dissipated, and he could not recommend them as friends.

Before quitting the business part of the city, where the hand-

some massive stone buildings gave an Italian air to the narrow streets, Ernest's roving eye happened to light on the name of 'Frankston,' legended upon a conspicuously bright brass plate.

'Ha!' said he, 'I remember something about that name. Is he a merchant—do you know him?'

'Yes,' said Mr. Selmore indifferently, 'he is a merchant, and a tolerably sharp man of business too. Takes station accounts; but I forget, you don't quite understand our phrases yet. He would be called more a private banker where you and I hail from. Why do you ask?'

'Merely because I happen to have a letter of introduction to him from a man I met abroad once, and I shall deliver it to-morrow.'

Mr. Selmore did not look sympathetic at this announcement, but he said little in contravention of his young friend's resolve.

'You must keep your weather eye open, if he gets you out to that pretty place of his, Neuchamp, or you will find yourself saddled with a big station and a tight mortgage before you can look round you.'

Ernest had more than once thought himself extremely fortunate in meeting with Mr. Selmore at so early a period of his colonial career. Now he was confirmed in that opinion.

'My dear sir, I shall be more than cautious in any dealings with him, I assure you,' he said warmly. 'Are these the public gardens? How different from anything I have seen before, and how surpassingly beautiful!'

They roamed long amid the glories of that semi-tropical park, rich with the spoils of the Orient and many a fairy isle of the Great South Sea. As the palms and strangely formed forest trees waved in the breeze fresh from a thousand leagues of ocean foam, as the blue waters glanced and sparkled through the clustering foliage while they sat under giant pines and looked over the sea-wall, and at the white-winged sailing boats flitting over the wavelets of the ocean-lake which men call the harbour of Sydney, Mr. Neuchamp freely acknowledged his wonder and his admiration. Stronger than ever was his faith in the destiny of a people with whom he was fixed in determination henceforth to cast in his lot.

Mr. Selmore had obtained his consent to dine with him at a well-known café, and thither, after visiting the baths, as the short twilight was deepening into night, they wended their way.

Upon entering the room the appearance of an extremely well-arranged dinner service was pleasant enough to view, after the somewhat less ornamental garniture of the table of a clipper-ship.

Ernest was introduced to two other friends of Mr. Selmore, also of the pastoral persuasion, and who looked as if town visiting was the exception in their rule of life.

The dinner passed off very pleasantly. The *menu* was well chosen, the cooking more than respectable, the wines unimpeachable. Ernest was sober from habit and principle. It would have been vain to have made the attempt to induce him to exceed. Still, with all reasonable moderation, it must be confessed that a man takes a more hopeful view of life after a good dinner, more especially in the days of joyous youth.

Mr. Selmore's friends were up-country dwellers, and it appeared that they were, in some sort, neighbours of his when at home. Much of the conversation insensibly took the direction of stock farming, and Mr. Neuchamp found himself listening to tales of crossing flooded rivers with droves bound for a high market, or of tens of thousands of sheep bought and sold in a day, or the wonderful price of wool, while intermingled were descriptions of feats of horsemanship varied with an occasional encounter with wild blacks.

In the midst of all this, Mr. Neuchamp's ardour kindled to such a pitch that he could not forbear asking one of the last arrived strangers whether there was not any station for sale in their district that would be suitable for him.

One of the pastorals looked at the other in astonishment, when they both looked reproachfully at Mr. Selmore.

'You don't mean to say,' at length broke out the older man, whose assiduity to the bottle had been unabated, 'that you haven't told our young friend here that Gammon Downs is for sale, 'pon my soul it's too bad!'

'Why, it's the very place in the whole blessed colony,' said the other, 'for a new arrival—good water, good sheep, a nice handy little run, and the best house in the district.'

Mr. Neuchamp was so struck with the expressive and interrogatory looks of the two bush residents, that he bent a searching look upon Mr. Selmore, as if he had in some mysterious way been ill-treated by the withholding of confidence.

'Well,' at length spoke out that gentleman, with an air of manly frankness, '*you* know me too well to think that I should propose to sell one of my own runs to a friend, comparatively inexperienced, of course, though well up in English farming, on the very first day I had met him. There *are* people, of course, who would do this, and more—but Hartley Selmore is not one of that sort.'

'But it does seem a shame,' said the grizzled squatter, filling his glass, 'that if you have one of the best runs in the country, that you should refuse to sell it to this gentleman merely because he is a personal friend.'

'Thank you,' said Ernest warmly, 'you have interpreted my sentiments admirably. If this estate, or station, would be so suitable, why should we not come to terms about it like any one else?'

'So remarkably cheap too,' said the other man; 'but I suppose Selmore wants a lot of cash down.'

'I have only five thousand pounds,' said Mr. Neuchamp, 'and perhaps your property is far above that limit.'

'It is less than I thought of taking,' said Mr. Selmore thoughtfully; 'but, yes; I don't mind arranging for bills, at one and two years, which, of course, if you bought, could be easily paid out of the profits of the station. But pass the claret, we won't talk any more shop to-night. Just so far that my friends, who live near my place, are going up the day after to-morrow. They will be glad of your company, and will show you the wonders of the bush, including Gammon Downs. You can then, my dear Neuchamp, judge for yourself.'

This plan appearing to Ernest to combine the utmost liberality on the part of the vendor with special advantages to the purchaser, who could have abundant time to examine and deliberate about his investment, was promptly acceded to.

He departed at the close of the evening to the hotel, at which place he had decided to stay, notwithstanding the tempting offer of a club bedroom. Ernest Neuchamp was not minded to give up his habits of observation, and for the exercise of his pursuit he deemed the hostelry of the period more favourable than any modern club.

Human nature is so constituted that a project feasible, favourable, and merely needing the very smallest propulsion into action over night wears a changed aspect with the dawn. As Mr. Neuchamp regained his suspended senses in a hot and mosquito-raided upper chamber in the Royal, the idea of becoming at a plunge the proprietor of Gammon Downs showed less alluring than over the joyous claret-illuminated board of yester eve. What if the name (given by the rude pioneers, it had been explained to him from some nonsensical circumstance) should be only too correct a designation for a delusive investment? What if Mr. Selmore were a little *too* obliging, confidential, and considerate for a true and generous vendor? What if his companions, who certainly appreciated the claret, were likely from friendship or interest to be leagued against the stranger? It behoved him to be careful. The slender resources of Neuchampstead had been strained to their utmost to supplement his younger brother's portion. Were this lost he could never regain his position. And though with the recklessness of a sanguine temperament, he would, without much regret, have addressed himself to the task of carving out a fortune with his own right hand in this land of promise, still he fully recognised the vast difference between a capital even of moderate amount and none at all.

Throwing on a few clothes hastily, he strolled off towards the baths, and after a leisurely swim in the cool translucent wave, he found his appetite for breakfast improved and his mental vision obviously cleared. He arrived at divers and various wise resolutions; and one of them was to call upon Mr. Frankston, the merchant. Two heads are better than one, decided Mr.

Neuchamp sapiently, and Granville said that this old gentleman's head was an exceedingly good one, nearly, but not quite, as good as his heart.

Discovering with some difficulty the precise street, almost a lane, where he had suddenly descried the well-remembered name, he walked into this office about half-past ten o'clock, and inquired for the head of the house. The clerk civilly motioned him to a chair, telling him that Mr. Frankston was engaged, but would not probably be long, as the gentleman with him was Captain Carryall, in an awful hurry to put to sea.

In rather less than five minutes the door opened suddenly, emitting a loud burst of laughter, and a tall sun-tanned man in a frock-coat, whose bold bright eyes were dancing again with fun and covert enjoyment of an apparently very keen jest.

As more than one anxious-looking person had passed into the outer office, Ernest walked in, and found himself in the presence of a stoutish old gentleman, with a high-coloured, clean-shaved countenance, who was chuckling with great relish, and subsiding from an exhausting fit of merriment. His white waistcoat predominated much over his clothing generally, giving that colour, with the aid of a spotless domain of shirt-collar and shirt-front, an unfair advantage over his sad-coloured suit of gray tweed.

'Good-morning to you, sir,—won't you take a chair,' said the old gentleman with much civility. 'Very rude to be laughing in the face of a visitor. But that Captain Carryall told me the best story I've heard for ages. Picked it up at the islands last cruise. Awful fellow! You'd excuse me, I'm sure, if you knew him. How can I be of use to you, my dear sir?'

This last query belonged evidently to another region than the one into which the sea-captain, with his *cœur-de-lion* face, had allured him. So Ernest produced his card, and a note 'from their mutual friend, Mr. Granville, he believed.' The old merchant glanced at the signature, and without another look hurled himself out of his armchair, and seizing Mr. Neuchamp's hand, wrung it with affectionate earnestness.

'My dear sir—my dear fellow,' gasped he; 'I'd have given a hundred pounds if our friend could have been here, and heard that yarn of Charley Carryall's. Now, attend to me while I tell you what you've got to do. You'll have enough to amuse yourself till five o'clock, and then you're to come here with your trunk. The carriage will call punctually at that hour, and you're to come out with me to my little place, on the South Head Road, and confer upon me the very great obligation of staying with me till you go up the country—if you do go. Now, isn't that settled?'

'I am very sorry,' stammered Ernest; 'it is so extremely kind of you; but I have more than half promised to go up the country to-morrow to look at a station with a view to buying it.'

‘And get sold yourself,’ interjected Mr. Frankston. ‘Not just yet, if you’ll be my boy for a year or two. Whose desirable property is it?’

‘It belongs to a Mr. Selmore, whom I met at the Royal Hotel,’ answered Ernest, ‘who was very kind, and gave me some very good advice.’

‘Ha! ha! ha!’ shouted the old boy, becoming very purple in the face; ‘knew it was him—Gammon Downs, eh! Wonderful man, take in his own father if he was hard up, and suffer his venerable grandsire and maiden aunts to invest their last penny in a sour grass country, with fluky sheep, Cumberland and scab given in. Hanged if he wouldn’t, and go to church immediately afterwards. Most remarkable man, Hartley Selmore!’

Mr. Neuchamp wondered how Mr. Frankston knew the name of Mr. Selmore’s valuable estate, and how he had ever made any money, if he did nothing but laugh. Indeed, it seemed to be his chief occupation in life, judging from his conduct since they had met.

‘Then you would not advise me to invest just at present?’ inquired he.

‘Not unless you wish to be in the possession of a small, *very* small amount of experience, and not one solitary copper at the end of twelve months,’ said Mr. Frankston, with great decision. ‘This is a bad time to buy, stock are falling. Don’t begin at all till you see your way. If you meet Selmore tell him you’ve changed your mind for the present, and will write and let him know when it is convenient for you to inspect Gammon Downs. Five, sharp! old man;’ and with a paternal glance in his quick twinkling eye, Mr. Frankston made an affirmative nod to his chief clerk, who then and there entered, and a farewell one to Ernest, who after he left the portals stood for a moment like a man in a dream.

‘This is certainly a most remarkable country,’ he soliloquised; ‘with their outward resemblance to Englishmen, there must be some strange mental divergence not easily fathomed. I remember Granville telling me that this old buffer was a better father to him than his own had ever been, or some such strong expression; therefore I will at once decide to act upon his advice; Selmore and his winning way, notwithstanding. One must take up a position firmly or not at all. So I shall elect to stand or fall by this apoplectic old white-waistcoated guardian-angel, as he proposes to be.’

‘My dear Neuchamp,’ said a cheery voice, while a cheery hand smote him familiarly on the back, ‘you look absorbed in contemplation. This is the wrong country for that. Action, sir, action is the word in Australia. Now, do you know what I was doing when I ran against you?—actually going down to Bliss’s livery stables to see if I could pick you out a decent hack. Burstall and Scouter are going to start early to-morrow, and of course you’ll want a hack that won’t frighten you after coming

from the old country. With luck you'll be under the verandah at Gammon Downs on the afternoon of the fourth day.'

Ernest braced himself together, and fixing his eyes upon the somewhat shifting orbs of his agreeable friend, said with studied calmness—

'I shall be extremely sorry, my dear sir, to put you or your friends to any inconvenience on my account, but I have changed my mind, and do not think of leaving Sydney for a month or two.'

He was conscious of a stern, half-angry, searching gaze, which seemed to drag out of his countenance every word of the conversation with Mr. Frankston, before Mr. Selmore said grandly, 'I am sorry to hear that you have so suddenly altered your plans. I had written to the overseer at Gammon Downs to have everything in readiness to receive you, and Burstall and Scouter will, I know, be put out at losing the pleasure of your company. But of course if you have made other arrangements—only I am afraid that if you don't feel disposed to name a day for visiting Gammon Downs I may possibly dispose of it privately, and as the subject has cropped up (not at my initiation, you are aware), I do honestly think that no place in the country would have suited you half as well.'

Ernest felt sorely tempted to say that in a fortnight or three weeks he would be able to go up, but he remembered Mr. Frankston's suggestion, and rather coldly answered that he would write and inform Mr. Selmore when it would be convenient for him to inspect Gammon Downs. The inevitable smile, which was worn in all weathers upon the face of Hartley Selmore, had so little real sincerity about it after this statement, that when he had received a warm parting grasp, Ernest felt strongly convinced that he had fitted the right arrow to the string.

CHAPTER III

IN one respect at least it cannot be denied that the new country differs widely from the old. Events of important and fateful nature succeed each other with a rapidity so great as to affect the actor with a sensation of unreality. He soon learns, however, that this high-pressure transaction of life involves issues none the less exacting of consequences. He recognises the necessity of watchfulness, of prompt decision, and abandons himself to the accelerated rate of speed with a degree of confidence which he cannot help suspecting to be recklessness in disguise. It may be that ideas akin to this view of the subject passed through Mr. Neuchamp's reflective mind while waiting for the appointed time at which he was to meet Mr. Frankston at his office. But a few hours since he had been on the verge of a headlong and what now appeared to him a dangerous investment, in which his whole capital might have been swamped, and his plans for social and colonial regeneration delayed for years, if not wholly frustrated. Now, with an equally violent oscillation, he had abandoned one recent friend, and adopted another equally unknown; to-morrow he might be embarked upon another project with equal risk of proximity to a colonial whirlpool capable of swallowing an argosy. What was he to do in this frightful procession, where fortune and ruin followed each other upon the path of life like express trains?

Was there such a thing as prudence, hesitation, or delay in Australian business matters? He would not be so credulous again. Was this cheerful old merchant, whose speech was kindness, and whose eye was truth apparently, to be unreservedly trusted? He would hear what his counsel was like meanwhile; he knew his friend Granville to be clear-sighted and direct. He fully trusted him, and had good reason to do so. Yes—he would put his fortune on this die. *Vogue la galère!*

He had consulted his watch more than once before the hansom deposited him with a portmanteau at the office of Paul Frankston and Co., at two minutes past five o'clock. Just afterwards, a well-appointed carriage, drawn by a well-matched

pair of bays, drove rapidly up to the door. As he was approvingly regarding the well-bred horses, he did not observe that a young lady inside was essaying to open the door of the carriage. Ernest, shocked at his unchivalrous conduct, rushed to the door, wrenched it open, and with a slight but deferential bow assisted her to alight. She walked at once into the office, followed by Mr. Neuchamp.

'I have been to Shaddock's, papa, for some books, and I thought I was late,' she said, throwing her arms round the old man's neck, unconscious that Ernest was immediately behind.

'You're generally punctual, puss, and so I won't scold her, Mr. Neuchamp,' said the old boy with his customary chuckle, as the young lady turned round and beheld with surprise the involuntary witness of her tribute of affection. 'Mr. Neuchamp, my daughter Antonia. My dear, this gentleman is coming to stay with us for a few months—for a year or two—all his life, perhaps, so the sooner you get acquainted the better.'

Then the young lady smiled, and hoped that Mr. Neuchamp would find their house pleasant, and become accustomed in time to papa's jokes.

'I can tell you it's no joke at all, miss. You know very well that if Mr. Granville would have had you, I should have ordered you to marry him forthwith. Now, Mr. Neuchamp is a great friend of his, and all we can do for him will be too little.'

'Mr. Granville was the nicest man I ever met,' affirmed the young lady. 'As for marrying, that is another matter. I dare-say Mr. Neuchamp is coming to a proper understanding about your assertions, papa. How do you like the view, Mr. Neuchamp?'

As she spoke she leaned partly out of the carriage and gazed seawards. They were now driving upon a rather narrow and winding road, smoothly gravelled and well kept, much like a country lane in England. On the southern side the hill rose abruptly above them; on the lower side a dwarf wall of sandstone blocks occasionally protected the traveller from a too precipitous descent. Shrubs and flowers, as strange to Mr. Neuchamp as the flora of the far-famed bay, but a mile or two from them now, was to Sir Joseph Banks, bordered the road on either side in rich profusion. But the eye roamed over the intervening valley, over villas of trim beauty, clean-cut in the delicately pale sandstone, to the wondrous beauty of the land-locked sea. Blue as the *Ægean*, it was superior in its astonishing wealth of bays, mimic quays, and peerless anchorage to any harbour in the world. Crafts of all kinds and sizes floated upon its unruffled wave, from the majestic ocean steamer, gliding proudly to her anchorage, to the white-winged, over-rigged sailing boat, with her crew of lads seated desperately on the windward gunnel, to squatter out like a brood of wild ducks and right their crank craft, should fortune and the breeze

desert them. Northward rose the 'sullen shape' of the great sandstone promontory, the North Head, towering over the surges that break endlessly at its base, and with its twin sentinel of the south, guarding the narrow entrance to the unrivalled haven. The fresh breeze swept through the girl's hair and tinged her cheek with a transient glow, as she said, 'Is not that lovely? I have seen it almost daily for years, but it never palls on me.'

'Beautiful as a dream landscape,' said Ernest from his heart. 'It makes one recall dear old Sir Walter's words—

'Where's the coward that would not dare
To fight for such a land?'

'We are a peaceful people so far,' said Mr. Frankston; 'but I fancy that we should take to war kindly enough in the event of invasion, for instance, and hammer away as briskly and as doggedly as our forefathers.'

'How many years have you been in this colony, may I ask?' said Ernest. 'Not long enough to shake off British feelings and prejudices, I am certain.'

'About ten years,' deposed Mr. Frankston confidently.

'Oh, papa!' said Miss Antonia.

'Well!' said the old gentleman, looking roguishly at her, 'I may have been here a *leetle* longer; but I am within the strict limits of truth in stating that I have been here for ten years—there is no doubt about that.'

Thus chatting, they had arrived at a pair of iron gates, through which entering, they turned into the smoothest of gravel roads, which was obviously watered daily.

The grounds through which the upstanding bay horses bore them over the superb gravel, were extensive, but in perfect order. Many of the trees, chiefly of semi-tropical habit, were of great age, and their broad glossy leaves, faintly stirred by the sea-breeze, had a murmuring sound, which told the heart of an imaginative listener tales of a calm enchanted main of coral reefs, of palm-fringed, milk-white strands, and all the wonders of the charmed Isles of the Great South Sea.

They drew up at the door of a large old-fashioned mansion, built of pale sandstone and surmounted by an extremely broad paved verandah, looking like a section of an ice-house.

'Mr. Neuchamp!' said the old gentleman, 'this is your home as long as you are in Australia. I hope you like the look of it. It's exactly twelve minutes to dinner-time; so I recommend both of you to waste no time in dressing. James!'

A serious-looking man-servant advanced, and taking Ernest's portmanteau inducted him into a fascinating bedroom, with such a view of the sea that he was nearly led into forgetting the old gentleman's paternal admonition, and being late for dinner.

However, by putting on extra steam, after the important

transaction of the tie was completed, he managed to re-enter the hall just as Mr. Frankston came skipping downstairs, and was immediately entrusted with the care of Miss Frankston as far as the dining-room.

The evening was warm, but the perfection of cookery combined with the quality and temperature of the wines to prevent any deep feeling of inconvenience. Miss Frankston talked pleasantly and unaffectedly, while the old gentleman neglected no opportunity of interjecting a joke or telling some remarkably good story, for Mr. Neuchamp's benefit, of which his daughter did not always see the point.

After dinner Miss Frankston retired, with an assurance from her father that they did not intend to absent themselves for more than ten minutes, after which the serious butler brought in tenderly another bottle of claret, and departed.

'Fill your glass, Mr. Neuchamp,' said the old man; 'it won't hurt your head, nor your—any other part, I guarantee, for I imported it myself, and let us talk a *very* little business. What do you think of doing?'

'My intention is fixed to purchase a landed property, an estate or station, as you call them. Of course I can only begin in a small way, and that was why Mr. Selmore's place, Gammon Downs, seemed particularly suited.'

'Gammon Downs has ruined every man, but Selmore, who has ever had anything to do with it. It's a sour, bad little place, in which you would have lost all your money in about a year, and would have had to sell, or give away, the stock.'

'And did Mr. Selmore know that it was a bad investment, an undesirable property, when he offered it to me?'

'I am sorry to say,' quoth the old gentleman, 'that he *did* know it, perfectly well; he knew that it has ruined half a dozen men, whose names I could give you.'

'And is he considered to be a gentleman and a man of honour, in this part of the world?' inquired Mr. Neuchamp in tones of great surprise.

'Well, he *is* a gentleman—that is, if good birth, good manners, and a good education go to make one. But he has always speculated to the verge of his capital, and now, stock being rather low, he is decidedly hard up. But he is a wonderfully sharp hand, and he generally contrives to get hold of a "black hat" at least once a year, which has pulled him through so far.'

'A black hat?' demanded Ernest; 'and why not?—they seem common enough. And why should a hat, black or white, help him in any way?'

'You don't quite understand,' answered Mr. Frankston, with a twinkle of his fun-loving gray eyes, 'though it is more a bush expression than a town one, and rather slangy. A "black hat" in Australian parlance means a new arrival. And as people without colonial experience, like yourself, for instance, cannot

be expected to understand the relative value of stock and stations, such a purchaser falls an easy prey to a talented but unscrupulous man like your friend Selmore.'

A light suddenly illumined the understanding of Mr. Neu-champ, whose faculties, like those of enthusiasts generally, were keen, if occasionally misdirected.

'So *that* was what his friend Evelyn laughingly alluded to when they met us yesterday. "I see you have your black hat with you," he said.'

'By Jove! you don't say so; did Evelyn say that?' laughed the commercial mentor; 'just like him; for two pins he'd have warned you not to believe a word he said. Fine fellow, Evelyn! And what did Mr. Selmore say?'

'He only smiled, took off his own hat—an ordinary "Lincoln and Bennett"—stroked it, and put it on his head again.'

'Capital, capital! Oh lord! that was Selmore all over. You can't easily match him. He has the devil's own readiness. Deuced clever fellow he always was! It's a pity, too, really it is. If he were not so desperately cornered, I believe he's a kind-hearted fellow in the main. But when he has bills to meet he'd take in his own father.'

'Thou shalt want ere I want,' as that famous free-lance, Mr. Dugald Dalgetty, formerly of Marischal College, remarked, thought Ernest; but he said, 'It seems then that my small capital was very nearly appropriated to the retirement of Mr. Selmore's bills payable, which was *not* my primary intention in choosing a colonial career. My dear sir, I shall never be sufficiently thankful for your kind advice. What would you advise me to do now, if I may trespass further on your great kindness?'

'My dear boy, as Granville's friend, I look upon you as my son temporarily; and if I had a son who had just completed his education and wished to purchase station property, I should say to him, this is a country and stock-farming is a profession not to be understood all at once. Before investing your money spend a little time in learning the ways of the people of the country and of the management of stock before you invest a shilling.'

'And how long do you think a man of reasonable intelligence ought to be in gaining the requisite knowledge?' asked Ernest, rather dismayed at the prospect of a lengthened term of apprenticeship.

'Not a day less than two years,' answered Mr. Frankston decisively. 'My advice to you is to travel for a month or two through the interior, and then to locate yourself on some station where you can acquire the details of practical management.'

'But will not that be expensive, and what could I do with my money in the meantime?'

'It will not be expensive; and as to your money, you can lodge it in a bank, where you will receive interest at current

rates. You can select any of our Sydney banks, which are quite as safe as the Bank of England. I shall then be happy to give you introductions which will secure you a home and the means of acquiring the necessary knowledge.'

'Thanks, a thousand thanks,' quoth Ernest, much relieved ; 'at any rate I shall feel safe. I shall gladly take your advice ; and the sooner I am off the better.'

'Better stay a month with me,' urged the kind-hearted old boy ; 'there is plenty of time for you to learn all about stock, and how to distinguish between Gammon Downs and a run that, if it doesn't make a fortune all at once, will not ruin you under five years at any rate.'

But the man to whom he spoke had not crossed ten thousand miles of ocean, torn up old associations, and severed himself from the inherited life of an English country gentleman, to linger by the wayside. So he made answer—

'My dear sir, I feel that if I have left many good friends behind I have found one as kind and more effectual in help and counsel. But my purpose is fixed. I cannot rest without I feel that I am on my way to its fulfilment. With your permission I must leave town next week at farthest.'

'Well, well—I am not sure but that you are wise. Sydney is an easy place to spend money in, and there is nothing like buckling to when there is work to be done. I must see and pick you up a horse.'

'Do you know,' said Mr. Neuchamp with an air of slight diffidence, 'that I much prefer to walk ; I shall see more of the country and be less hampered, I imagine, on foot.'

'*Walk ! walk !*' repeated Mr. Frankston, rather taken aback ; 'don't think of it.'

'Why not, may I ask ?'

'Because in this country no one walks. It is too hot for that sort of thing, and it is not exactly the thing for a gentleman.'

'But,' pleaded Ernest, 'I am a tolerable pedestrian ; many a pleasant walking tour I have had in England, and indeed on the Continent. Is there any danger ?'

'None, that I am aware of—but I would certainly advise you to get a horse, or a couple ; they are cheap enough here.'

'You won't be offended if I say that I really prefer walking. It is a capital thing in many ways ; and I shall not get a chance of seeing Australian life without conventional spectacles so easily again perhaps.'

'Please yourself, then,' said Mr. Frankston ; 'I am very much in favour of letting people alone, particularly in unimportant matters ; you will find out for yourself, I daresay, why I advised you to commence your journey on the outside of a good horse. You won't take any more wine ? Then we'll go and get a cup of coffee from Antonia.'

They found that young lady ensconced in a large cane chair

upon the balcony in front of the drawing-room, gazing dreamily over the dark glimmering waters.

'You will find coffee on that round table, Mr. Neuchamp; and you, papa, will find your cigar-case on that ledge. Mr. Neuchamp, if you like to smoke, pray do so; I have no dislike to it in the open air.'

Mr. Neuchamp did not smoke. He held it to be a waste of time, of money, of brain-power; leading likewise to a false content with circumstances, with which the true man should wage ceaseless warfare. So he brought his chair near to that of Miss Frankston, and as the old gentleman lighted his cigar and leaned back in much comfort at some distance, he felt fully disposed for a little æsthetic talk.

'What a glorious night,' he remarked, 'with this faint fresh sea-breeze; how grand the effect of the darkly bright water, the burning stars, and this superb cloudless heaven.'

'It is so indescribably glorious,' made answer Miss Frankston, 'that I feel incensed with myself for not delighting in it more freshly and intensely. But it is thus with all familiar marvels that one has seen all one's life.'

'All one's life?' repeated he.

'I was born in this house,' said she simply, 'and have sat on a chair like this, and gazed on the sea, as we are doing now, when I was a small lonely child.'

'Oh! dreamy and luxurious southerner,' laughed he. 'A life of lotus-eating! Has it affected the tenor of your mind with any indisposition to exertion or change?'

'As far as I can pretend to know, it has had the reverse tendency in my case. I have always had a passionate desire to travel. I am my father's own daughter in that respect, he says.'

'And where has Mr. Frankston chiefly been?'

'Where has he not been? When he was young he managed to get away to sea, and roamed about the world splendidly; he has been to New Zealand, of course; all over the South Sea Islands; besides having travelled to England and the Continent, the East and West Indies, Russia, America, China, and Japan.'

'You quite take my breath away. Your papa is a perfect Marco Polo. But why should he have gone to England?'

'In order to see it, of course. Every Australian with sufficient brains to comprehend that there are more streets in the world than George Street would like to do that.'

'And was Mr. Frankston born in Australia? I thought he told me that he had been ten years here.'

'So he has been, and fifty more. He did not say *only* ten years. He likes to joke about being taken for an Englishman, and says it is because he has a red face and a white waistcoat.'

'Well, I do not see the resemblance on those grounds,' made answer Mr. Neuchamp guardedly. 'But really, your papa is so

exactly like an old gentleman of my acquaintance, who is a very Briton of Britons, that I took it for granted that he must be English.'

'So he is English, and so am I English; only we were not born in that small great country. But you *must* think that there ought to be some distinguishing manner, or accent, about Australians, or you would not exhibit surprise at the resemblance.'

'If I ever had such an absurd idea, I am now entirely disabused of it,' said Mr. Neuchamp gallantly; 'and I must hope that in a short time to come I may be taken for an Australian, of which at present there is not apparently the least prospect.'

'Indeed, there is not,' replied Miss Frankston; 'pray excuse my smiling at the idea.'

'But why should I be so advertised, apparently by my whole personal effect upon society, that the waiters at the hotel are as aware of the fact, the cabmen, the persons whom I pass in street, as if I had "passenger's luggage" marked on my shirt-front? It is not entirely my complexion, for I see blonde people in every direction; nor my clothes, nor my speech, I hope.'

'I do not know, indeed. I cannot say. There must be some difference, or people would not notice it. But you must not imagine that because you are known to have just come from home that anything short of a compliment is intended. Indeed,' said the girl with some diffidence, 'it's quite the other way.'

'I am delighted to hear you say so,' returned Mr. Neuchamp, 'and it will comfort Wilhelm Meister during his "Wander-jahre."'

'Kennst du das Land?'

sang she. 'Are you fond of music, Mr. Neuchamp? for I think I shall go in and give papa his nightly allowance of harmony. He refuses always to go to bed until I have sung to him. You had better keep him company.'

Mr. Neuchamp did so, the air of the balcony and the sight of the wondrous Southern Cross being as yet more attractive than the lady of the castle and her song.

'That's right,' said the old gentleman, lighting another cigar and composing himself to listen. 'Pity you don't smoke; it's an added pleasure, and one hasn't too many in this world. It's a luxury that lasts—one of the few things you can do as well when you're old as when you are young.'

'I must differ from you,' returned Mr. Neuchamp. 'I think it often leads to the wasting of valuable time, but I bow to your greater experience.'

'And greater age; and you are right to be on the self-denying side for the present. But ask yourself what an old buffer like myself can do with his evenings more profitably. My eyes—not so good as they were thirty years since—have generally had a

fair day's work before dinner-time. Cards, talk, and a moderate smoke make up an old man's evening. When I look at the sea here—and she always was a good friend to me—hear Antonia sing and play—bless her heart! and smoke a very good cigar, it is rather a cunningly mixed enjoyment, you must own. Now she's off.'

The last statement was made simultaneously with the first notes of a song which floated out through the opened French windows, and proved to Mr. Neuchamp—a fair connoisseur—that his hostess had a fresh, true, soprano voice, and rather unusual execution. As he sat listening to song after song which Miss Frankston bestowed upon them with an utter absence of apologetic affectation, as the stars burned more brightly in the cloudless southern sky, as the wavelets kept their rhythmical murmurous monotone, he involuntarily asked himself if he had left *all* the social luxuries in the other hemisphere.

'This is pleasant,' said the merchant, after a long silence of words, with something between a sigh and a shake; 'but there are such things as breakfast and business for to-morrow. We must end the concert. Make for that small table in the corner.'

Upon the piece of furniture referred to there stood a silver-encrusted inviting spirit-stand, with a bottle of iced Marco-brüner.

'You must allow me to thank you for your songs, Miss Frankston,' said Ernest; 'whether the surroundings completed the witchery I cannot tell, but I have rarely enjoyed music so much.'

'I am glad you like my singing,' said she simply; 'we see so few people that I am not always sure whether my old music-master and myself extract the correct expression in much of our practice.'

'I can assure you of the correctness of your rendering,' promptly assented the stranger-critic. 'I heard the last song you were good enough to favour us with sung the week before I left. It had just been published. And I certainly prefer a slight emendation, which I think you have made.'

'Most satisfactory!' said she, with a mock inclination of respect; 'and now good-night. Papa and breakfast wait for no man.'

CHAPTER IV

Few things are pleasanter, in their way, than staying in an agreeable house, while the welcome, the local recreations, the allotted leisure, are alike in the fresh bloom of unexhausted enjoyment. Your justifiable curiosity as to your friends' intellects, experiences, and power of amusing you is for a while unsatiated. All is new and delightful; to be savoured with the full approval of conscience. The gardens are enchanted, the ladye peerless fair, the stranger knights courteous, the host an incarnation of appreciation and generosity. All this glamour lasts undiminished for the first fleeting week or two, possibly survives the month. Then the process of disenchantment commences. Either you have business external to the castle, or you have not. In the former case, you begin to feel darkly fearful of neglect, and conscience, if you keep one, self-interest if you do not, commences to be 'faithful,' even to inconvenience. If you own no care, or tie, or duty, which may not be postponed to the 'Cynthias of the minute,' and still prolong your stay, you cease to be a guest and fall into the more prosaic rôle of habitué, inmate, lodger, amenable to family rules and to criticism. Then the fair ladye, if she be the sole cause of detention, is at times sharply scanned, lest the proverbial chandelier bear hard on the value of the entertainment. On the whole, a state of perpetual arrival at the mansions of favourably prejudiced strangers, combined with comparatively early departure—unerringly anticipating the first shade of social satiety—would probably comprise most of the pleasurable sensations permissible in this imperfect existence.

Mr. Neuchamp had, from the first, no thought of trenching upon even the border of this 'debatable land'; for after a very short trial of this pleasant life he told Miss Frankston that if he stayed for twelve months, he should still find new objects of interest. He thereupon completed the painful process known as 'making up one's mind,' and arranged to leave for the interior on the following day. Not that he was peculiarly sensible to any state of uncertainty. His enthusiastic temperament saved him from indecision. Having, with

what he believed to be sufficient care and circumspection, elaborated a plan, he was uneasy and incapable of enjoyment until an advance in line was made. His the fervid temperament, which delights itself with intensifying the action of all warfare, declared against circumstance, ever the foe of generous youth and ardent manhood.

So impatient was Mr. Neuchamp to hear the first shot of his campaign fired, that he had the stern virtue to refuse to remain another week for a certain picnic, at which all the notabilities of the metropolis were to be present, and at which the purest form of social pleasure might be anticipated.

'My dear Miss Frankston,' replied he, when urged upon this subject by Antonia, 'I grieve that I cannot consistently comply with your kind request. But I feel myself so rapidly turning into a mere town loungee, that I am sure another week or two would complete the transformation, and my moral ruin. For besides, unfortunately'—here he smiled at his expressed regret—'I fixed to-morrow for my departure from your most pleasant and hospitable home, and I *never* alter my plans.'

'I should be very sorry to wish you to alter them for our sake,' said the girl, unable, however, to suppress a slight tone of pique. 'No doubt you will be much happier exploring the highway across the Blue Mountains, which, of course, will be a great novelty to you. But I should not have thought a few days would have made any difference. You will find it dull enough at Garrandilla, where you are going.'

'Dull!' said he, 'dull! in the heart of a new continent, a new world, with untold stores of new plants, new companions, new experiences, the outset of a new life. My dear Miss Antonia, how *can* it be dull to any person of ordinary intelligence?'

'Well,' answered she, smiling, 'perhaps it is I who am dull for thinking so. Most young men who have left our house for the interior have been of that opinion. But I will not attempt to cloud your anticipations. Only, I really *do* think you ought not to walk.'

'Why not? What possible difference can it make how I get over the twenty or thirty miles a day before I reach the station, to which your father has so kindly given me letters of introduction? Such jolly walking tours as I have had in England and Wales, in Ireland, and one lovely vacation tour in our old home, Normandy.'

'What a charming thing to be able to see the place where one's ancestors lived a thousand years ago!' said she eagerly. (Mr. Neuchamp, having let slip the admission of the early settlement of his family in that rather stirring Norse colony, had been cross-questioned upon the subject.) 'How you must have enjoyed it! That's the worst of Australia—there's nothing a hundred years old in it, except a red-gum tree. But seriously, you may find yourself exposed to inconveniences by walking,

like a labouring man. It is not the fashion in our country for gentlemen to walk.'

Miss Antonia had entirely settled the matter by the last observation. Fashion had been through life one of the deadliest enemies to the peace of Ernest Neuchamp. In his own country he had alarmed his relatives and scandalised his neighbours by his wild defiance of that successor of Thor and Odin, as he profanely termed the social belief of decorous Christians. Was he to bow the knee to this false god in a strange land, which at least he hoped to be pure from the idolatries of the effete civilisation from which he had fled? Not so, by St. Newbold! the patron saint of his house. He smiled with great gentleness as he answered, with half sad but most irrevocable decision—

'My dear Miss Frankston, I did not become a colonist with any idea of being trammelled by usages or customs. You will pardon me, I am sure, if I retain my first intention.'

'Most certainly,' said she. 'I shouldn't wonder if you had a friend or two in England who called you obstinate. But you will tell me some day how you got on, and whether there was *any* small portion of reason in the advice given you.'

'I shall for ever feel grateful,' he said warmly, 'for the intention of the advice, and for the great kindness which has accompanied it. Whether or not I succeed in Australia, I shall always have one pleasant remembrance to look back upon.'

'My father, and I also, will be glad if you feel thus,' she said, with the ordinary calm kindness of her tone; 'and now, I must go to town. You leave to-morrow?'

'Yes; I am sorry, in one way, to say so.'

'Then papa will be able to give you his final counsels to-night. I know he wishes to have some last words with you.'

Dinner over and the night being fine, as usual, an adjournment to the sea-balcony was carried unanimously. When the first cigar was half through, Mr. Frankston thus addressed his guest—

'So you are off to-morrow, Antonia tells me, and can't be persuaded to wait for the grand picnic. I don't say you're wrong. When the ship's ready and the wind's fair, it's better to wait for no repairs. You're going to walk, too. It's a long way; but you're young and strong, and you'll find out all I can tell you for yourself; if you don't, all the telling in the world won't help you. Now, see here, we'll arrange everything for the first twelve months, or two years, if you don't care to change.'

'You're most kind and generous, my dear sir, and I don't know what I should have done without you,' said Ernest.

'Thank you,' said Mr. Frankston; 'we'll see about that in about five or six years, if we all live so long—we can't tell just yet. I may be persuading you not to buy in with a rising market, which would double your money in three years, or I may be saving you from losing all but what you stand upright

in in about the same time. I think it's the last, but we can't tell. This is an uncertain country, particularly about rain. And rain means fat stock, cheap money, and general prosperity.'

'But can't one provide against the want of rain?' inquired Mr. Neuchamp, who was prone to array himself against Providence, holding that all things might be met or conquered by energy and foresight. 'Irrigation, for instance.'

'There is *no* provision that can be made,' said the man of experience, 'except on a small scale, and irrigation means labour; and paying for labour in Australia, except to a very limited extent, means ruin. A great drought is like a heavy gale at sea; you may be saved, or you may go down with all hands. One visitation is as easy to stop or to calculate about as the other.'

'And is it a drought now?'

'Yes; and one of the worst ever known.'

'Then what will happen?'

'Stock,' said the old man, 'will keep on falling in price. Many stockholders will be ruined, including Selmore, if he does not clear out Gammon Downs to a——'

'A black hat,' laughed Ernest. 'I shall remember that joke. It came near, as our American fellow-passenger would say, costing me five thousand pounds.'

'But they won't be all ruined,' continued Mr. Frankston; 'and what I strongly advise you to do is this—you've left your money, for a year certain, in the Bank of New Holland, for which you'll get tidy interest, and it's as safe as the Bank of England—you go, where I give you this letter of introduction, to Forrester, who is a good fellow and knows me, and it's a good station, Garrandilla; that's a great matter, as you will find. There you will be treated like a gentleman. It will cost you nothing but your clothes. There you'll learn all that can be learnt about stock. In a couple of years, say (here Mr. Neuchamp winced), or perhaps eighteen months, you'll be fit to look after a station, and able to buy one for yourself.'

'Don't you think a year's experience,' pleaded Mr. Neuchamp, 'might——'

'No, I don't,' stoutly asserted the senior; 'and in two years it's my belief that your five thousand pounds will buy as large a station as ten thousand would now.'

The following morning saw Mr. Neuchamp, who had risen early and made all his arrangements, fully prepared for the momentous plunge into real life. He had attired himself in an old tourist's suit of rough serviceable tweed, and donned a pair of thick-soled lace-up boots fitted for climbing mountain sides, and the roughest pedestrian work that might occur. He had filled his knapsack with the requisites that a gentleman cannot dispense with, even in the lightest marching order, and had adopted a brown wide-awake hat, which he trusted would

relieve him henceforward from any injurious sobriquet. Thus armed at all points, he awaited breakfast and the arrival of Antonia Frankston, to whom he felt inclined to bid a more heartfelt farewell than he had thought any young lady in the southern hemisphere would have earned the right to receive.

Let me not be understood to assume for a moment that Mr. Neuchamp was wholly insensible to the tender passion. But he was fully possessed and occupied for the present by the 'enterprise of great pith and moment' which he contemplated. And the boy-god found the tenement of his heart for the time so thoroughly filled by busy, unsympathetic ideas, that he was fain to hover like a bird round a populous dovecote, vainly seeking a single unoccupied pigeon-hole.

'Friendship, indeed,' Mr. Neuchamp confessed to himself, 'had sprung up of an intellectual and truly fraternal nature between himself and this girl, who had but few companions, and fewer intimates of her own age.' But he told himself that it was a prosaic alliance of intelligence, natural, and almost inevitable between two people not very different in age, whose temperaments were rather widely apart, but whose tastes and feelings assimilated closely. Just the kind of feeling he might have had for his lady cousins in England, but that they showed no respect for his opinions and openly jeered at his aspirations.

Now Antonia Frankston paid the compliment of respect to all the principles and opinions which he enunciated, even while doing battle unyieldingly against their practical application.

'It is a great matter to be thoroughly comprehended,' he had said to himself. 'One may be right or one may be wrong. I am the last person to deny free exercise of opinion, and the healthful effect of free antagonism. But I must own to a preference of being understood by my critics.'

Under this stimulus he had poured forth, in the leisure time which he had abundantly enjoyed with Miss Frankston, his plans for the regeneration of society, and of Australian life in particular. He had foretold the reign of abstract justice, and the coming dethronement of shams. He saw afar a general refinement in manners, pervading culture, which was harmoniously to fuse classes, now so unhappily divided; the co-operation of labour with capital, and the equal partition of the public lands. In a word, all the fair visions of the higher life, the splendid possibilities of the race which commend themselves to ardent youth and generous manhood, in that springtime of the heart when beautiful emanations are evolved in multifarious glory, to be chilled and withered by colder age and hard experience.

To the record of these and similar aspirations, as they poured forth from the enthusiastic soul of Ernest Neuchamp, tinged with poetic thoughts and dignified by a pure 'enthusiasm of humanity,' had Antonia listened, by no means without interest. It was new to her to hear projects free from the taint of selfish

gain or personal advantage. And though she entered her protests, gently but firmly, against many of his conclusions, there was to him a deep interest in dialogues in which he secured so patient, so fair a listener, gifted with a high and cultured intelligence.

Thus Mr. Neuchamp made all necessary adieux, and having received his credentials, in the shape of a letter of introduction to the owner of Garrandilla, where he was to abide during his novitiate, and a letter of credit in case he should have unexpected need of money, departed from the hospitable gates of Morahmee.

With his knapsack on his back he paced through the city. Being not sufficiently philosophical, I must confess, to avail himself of the George Street pavement, he crossed Hyde Park, and turning round to take one last look at the blue waters and the grand headland, it may be that his eyes rested lingeringly upon the nearest point which he could recognise to Morahmee.

Then he turned his back upon nature's loveliness and fond regrets, and strode resolutely onward towards the far untried Waste—to him the land of hope and of endeavour.

Taking a somewhat diagonal course adown and across the old-fashioned dingy streets, where the aged, decrepit, but in some instances picturesque dwellings tell a tale of the earliest colonial days, Mr. Neuchamp presently debouched upon the great arterial thoroughfare which, before the advent of the steam king, led to that somewhat mysterious domain, vaguely designated as 'the bush.'

Here he began to put on his tourist pace, and no longer trammelled by fear of the fashionable world, exerted those powers of progression which had won him fame in Scottish Highlands, by Killarney's fair lake, and on the cols and passes which, amid eternal snow, girdle the monarch of the Alps.

Mile after mile, at a rattling pace, went he, pleased to find himself once more upon a highroad, though comparatively disused, as the Dover and Calais route, where the great empty posting-houses tell of ruin, and the 'ruthless king,' which has driven coach and guard, ostler and landlord, boots and barmaid, all off the road together. Such had been the doom of this once inevitable and crowded highway; and Mr. Neuchamp noted with interest the remains of a former state, long passed away.

'Really!' soliloquised he, 'I have come upon a locality adapted for antiquarian research. I did not expect that in Australia. As I perceive, those old buildings are massive and imposing, with walls of solidity far from common. What fine trees are in the orchards. I must see what o'clock it is. This venerable mansion seems inhabited; I wonder if I could get a glass of beer?'

This latter outcome of the inner consciousness, not particularly germane to antiquarian research, was the result of a discovery by Mr. Neuchamp that he was uncommonly heated.

The truth was that he had, in the ardour of his feelings, been pelting along at the rate of four miles and a half an hour, forgetting that the thermometer stood at 85 in the shade; hence his complexion was much heightened; his shirt-collar limp to a degree whence hope was fled for ever; 'his brow was wet with honest whatsynname,' while a general and unpleasant saturation of his whole clothing told the tale of a temperature unknown to his European experiences. To his great contentment, the hostelry was inhabited and still offered entertainment to man and that fellow-creature, whose good example had the more highly organised vertebrate followed what romances of crime had remained unwritten; what occupations, literary and sensational, had been gone; what reputations, even of Ouida, Miss Braddon, and that 'bright particular star' of the firmament of fiction, the great George Eliot herself, had been faint and prosaically mediocre! The surviving of the past favourites of the 'shouting multitude' owed its spirituous existence to the fact of a byroad from certain farms, here reaching the old highway. By dint of an early start, and a little night-work, the farmers and dealers were able to reach and return from the metropolis within the day, thus dispensing with the swift and, to provincial ideas, somewhat costly train. But the long hours and late and early travelling necessitated beer; hence this relic of past bibulousness with ancient porch hard by a real milestone, the twelfth, which our wayfarer hailed with joy, eagerly scanning the deeply-graven numerals.

He found the outer room presided over by an excessively clean old woman, whose starched cap and general get-up reminded him of a well-known Cambridge landlady. Espying a pewter, he demanded a pint of ale, and sitting down upon a bench, disposed of the cool draught with the deep enjoyment which the pedestrian or the worker alone knows. This duty completed, he consulted his watch, and finding that mid-day was passed, decided upon a slight refecton of bread and cheese, and a halt.

'So you still keep the house open?' he observed to his hostess. 'I see a good many of those along the road are closed.'

'So should we 'a been closed too,' said the ancient dame, 'but this road, as the fruit-carts and firewood and small farming loads comes in by, keeps a little trade up, and we've not a big family; there's my husband, as is out, and my son, as works in the garden, and does most of the work about the place, and Carry.'

'And you have lived here a long time, I suppose?'

'Over forty years, since my husband, John Walton got a grant of land, and we came here just after we married. We built the house after we'd made a bit of money, and planted the orchard, and did every mortal thing as is done.'

'And you lost all the traffic when the train commenced to run.'

'All the paying business ; everything but this small line as we used to despise. Father, he was for clearing out, but I couldn't bear to leave the old place ; we'd saved a bit o' money, and says I : " Well, father, suppose we live on here comfortable and steady, and don't change. There's Jem and Carry fit to do all the work ; we don't need no servants, you can potter about the garden, and the pigs and poultry, and bee-hives, and they all makes a bit of money, or saves it, and we'll, maybe, do as well as those that goes up into the bush, and goodness knows where." But you'll have some lunch, sir—please to walk this way.'

Mr. Neuchamp was forthwith inducted into an old-fashioned room, the size and pretensions of which showed the different style of the entertainment once supplied. Leading from this were several bedrooms, to the open door of one of which the old dame pointed. Here, with the help of a sufficiency of cold water and the cleanest towels, he restored himself to a condition favourable to the proper appreciation of lunch.

When he returned he found the table being laid by a neatly-dressed, modest-looking young woman of five or six and twenty.

'I suppose you are Carry ?' he said, mentally comparing her with an English country girl of the same rank and condition, and concluding that the damsel before him did not show to any great disadvantage.

'Mother's been telling you, sir, I suppose,' said the girl, smiling ; 'she's glad to talk about old times with any one, it's nearly all she has to do now.'

'Well, we had a chat about the state of the roads,' affably rejoined Mr. Neuchamp ; 'you have a very nice old place here, and I think you were very wise to stay.'

'I don't mind it,' said the girl, 'though it is awfully dull sometimes. I'm used to a quiet life ; but it's rather hard upon Jem, my brother that is, sir, for he might have bettered himself in many ways.'

'How do you think he might ?'

'Why, ever so many times he's had offers of employment, but he won't leave the old people ; and then, he might go into the bush.'

'The bush ! and is every one who goes into the bush certain to do well ?'

'Oh no, sir ; but every young man of spirit in the colony likes to have a turn, and run his chance there some time or other. Excuse me, sir, but you haven't been very long out, have you ?'

'How the deuce does she know that ?' inquired Mr. Neuchamp of himself. 'Is there anything written on this brow, and so on ? However, I have catechised her sufficiently, and cannot object to a little cross-examination in return.'

'Well, Carry, the truth is that I have *not* been very long out from home, as you very wisely have discovered ; that's the reason I am a little inquisitive about your country. But how did you know ?'

'By lots of things,' said Carry, rather mischievously; 'by your having such a fresh complexion, and so many mosquito-bites,—they don't bite us natives that way; and by your clothes, and your shirt-collar, and your boots, and your pack, or whatever it is—and by your being on foot.'

'What a long list, Carry! and the worst of it is, that if I was asked how I should know whether you are a native, as you call yourself, and not an English girl, I should not have half as many things to swear by.'

'And what would they be, sir?'

'Let me see. I think you are a little paler, for one thing—but that's the heat, I suppose—and rather taller—and a little, only a very little slighter—and your hands are smaller; just let me look, for I can't be sure; and, on the whole, rather prettier than most English girls are.'

'Oh, nonsense!' interrupted Carry, at this point, with a not wholly displeased expression. 'I don't believe half of it. I'm sure everybody says English girls have such lovely complexions and figures, and cut out us poor "currency lasses" altogether.'

'That's not true, Carry, my dear,' protested Mr. Neuchamp with warmth. 'I can assure you that no one would think to look at you that you had lived all your life in a climate something like a greenhouse, with the door shut. It can't be such a very bad one after all, if it turns out such very nice specimens of—'

Here Miss Carry pretended to hear her mother calling, and discreetly departed.

Ernest was too experienced a pedestrian to overwork himself, and blister his feet the first day, thereby converting the remaining portion of the journey into a penance; so finding himself in pleasant quarters, he determined to wait till the cool of the evening, and go on as far as the ancient and venerable town of Parramatta, which he was led to believe reared its double spires about eight miles farther on.

After enjoying the home-baked bread, the well-cured bacon, the fresh butter, and another tankard, he occupied himself with observing the pictures, which in rather grand gilt frames adorned the room. They smacked of the good old days. There was 'The Tally-ho Coach leaving the Post-office, Sydney.' A true English four-insider, with a team of highly improbable greys, proceeding at an impossible pace, from a pillared edifice with an enormous clock. The celebrated racehorse 'Jorrocks,' as he appeared winning his forty-fifth race, the majority of the cheering crowd depicted as wearing cabbage-tree hats. There was also the terrific finish at the Five Dock Steeplechase between Fergus and Slasher, with a sketch of the astonishing struggle, when Traveller beat Chester for the Sydney Cup after the fifth heat, on the old Sandy Course. This turf triumph had occurred about forty-five years since.

Much meditating upon the comparative antiquity and hoary

age of incidents, even in a colony, Mr. Neuchamp paid his modest bill, shouldered his knapsack, and prepared to depart from this beer fountain in the desert. Meeting the pleasant glance of Carry as he was passing the door, he turned and said, 'I must come down to Sydney next year, and I'll be sure to pay you a visit, Carry.'

'Oh, do!' she said; 'mother will be so pleased. But you haven't told me your name; how shall we hear of you?'

'If any one talks about Ernest Neuchamp to you, it will be of me.'

'Ernest is a pretty name,' said the girl, 'but "New-chum!" that is not your real name, is it? of course you are a new chum, though it would be rude to say so.'

'And what is "a new chum," Carry? That is not my name, though the pronunciation is not so far unlike.'

'Why, a new chum is a new arrival—a gentleman that——'

'A black hat?' suggested he.

'Well, it's all the same, I believe,' she answered; 'it means somebody who has just come and doesn't know anything about the country.'

'And a most extraordinary country it is,' muttered he; 'it appears that it is not to be known very readily, even after a short stay. Well, here is my card, Carry; you can spell it at your leisure. Good-bye, my dear, and take care of yourself till I come back next year.'

'Good-bye, sir; be sure you stop at the Red Cow, at Parramatta.'

This badinage over, Mr. Neuchamp pursued his journey, much refreshed in body, but exercised in mind by the similarity of his name to the accusation of newness and cockneyism, so to speak, which the colonial appellation conveyed. 'Most vexatious!' said he to himself; 'I thought I saw Antonia look warningly more than once at her father, when he seemed disposed to dwell on the pronunciation of my name. That must have been the *mot* she forbade.'

The sun was low as he strolled into the quiet, old-fashioned, rather hot town of Parramatta. Here he beheld, within a dozen miles of the thronged and eager metropolis, a population for the most part more incurious and unenterprising than if their habitation had been five hundred miles inland. Every one walked or sauntered down the streets with that thoroughly provincial absence of hurry which is so refreshing to the wearied mental labourer.

Among the lower classes, generation after generation had been born and grown, and aged, since the first occupation of the wonderful land, which has made such haste to become a nation. There seemed a large population of well-to-do retired capitalists, something under the millionaire class, who, having built cottages and planted orangeries (the export of oranges is the great trade feature of the locality), felt a calm confidence

that here they could wear out life with less than the usual friction.

He was much surprised and pleased to observe the unusually large number of oaks, elms, and ash trees which had by the pious founders been planted in and around the town. Many of these were of great age, speaking in an Australian sense, and had grown to be ornamental and dignified of aspect, besides being useful in point of shade.

As he walked slowly down the principal street he was pleased to see wide stretches of grass, a river, gardens, and a considerable exemption from the brick and mortar tyranny of latter days. The air was becoming pleasantly cool; a certain amount of loitering and musing, dear to Mr. Neuchamp's artistic mind, was observable. A few schoolboys passed, one pair with arms round one another's neck, sworn friends and tellers evidently of some mutually thrilling tale. The cabs were delightfully old-fashioned. The very air had a Rip Van Winkle flavour about it, so utterly foreign to the genius of a new country, that Mr. Neuchamp lamented to himself, as he captured a barefooted urchin and ordered him to show him to the Red Cow Inn, that he could not prolong his stay.

CHAPTER V

HE commenced his next day's journey at an early hour, in full vigour of mind and body and in charity with all men. He had fed and rested with keen relish, and all slight fatigue consequent on unaccustomed exercise had disappeared. The morning air was fresh and cool. The indescribable charm of the unworn day rested upon the rural landscape, where farmhouses, maize fields, orangeries, and orchards alternated with primeval woodlands and wide-stretching pastures. The houses were often old, the farming indifferent, the fences decayed ; but with all faults it was the country—the blessed country—and the heart of Ernest Neuchamp, a born and bred land worshipper, went out to the dew-bespangled champaign.

He halted no more until the great valley of the Hawkesbury lay before him, with again comparatively ancient settlement, composed of massively constructed houses, and even boasting—wonder of wonders—in this strange new land, of—ruins ! Yes ; memorials of the past were there ! of an epoch when the easily acquired fortunes of the military, or other notables of the day, had been devoted to the erection of mansions more in accordance with their British recollections than with the circumstances of the colony, or indeed with their regular incomes. Studding the wide fertile meadows were farmhouses of all grades of architecture and pretension. Enormous fields of maize, in spite of the untoward rainless season, told of the unsurpassed richness of a region which, after more than half a century's ceaseless cropping, maintained its fertility.

It so happened that the first two or three individuals who encountered Mr. Neuchamp as he pursued his way along the uniform high road, which led through the flat, somewhat Flemish-looking district, were men of unusual height, breadth, and solidity. Beyond the quick but observant glance habitual to him, our traveller exhibited no surprise at what he took to be exceptional individuals accidentally met. But after several miles' travelling and a repetition of inhabitants of the same vast stature, he commenced to realise the fact that he had come upon a human family of near relationship to the Anakim.

He then remembered some jesting remarks of Mr. Frankston, in which, for the purpose of pointing to some anecdote of entertaining, if not wholly instructive tendency, he had said 'as big and as slow as a Hawkesbury man,' or words to that effect.

'Here, then,' mused Ernest, after finally possessing himself of the fact, 'you have the result of an agricultural population, located upon rich level country, with ample means of subsistence and an absence of anxiety about the morrow almost absolute. Nearly eighty years have passed since the parent-farmers of this community were settled upon these levels. In their descendants you have the true New Hollander, like his prototype, large, phlegmatic, slow-moving, unenterprising, but bearing within him the germs of valiant resistance to tyranny at need, of steadfast labour, of mighty engineering, of deathless struggles for political freedom !'

Having traversed this land of Goshen—evergreen and fertile oasis of the eucalyptus wilderness, not excepting its Platt Deutsch habit of periodical total immersion, Ernest halted upon an eminence which bore traces of having been artificially cleared. He gazed upon the broad winding river at his feet, the wide expanse of river, sharply contrasted with the savage heights and rugged ravines of the great mountain-chain which apparently barred all onward path.

He moved a short distance forward, attracted by the appearance of the remains of an edifice placed exactly upon the brow of the hill, and found himself among the ruins of a mansion of far more than ordinary pretensions.

Fire had destroyed much of the main building, but neglect and abandonment were visible in the dislodged pillars, broken steps, grass-grown courtyard, and roofless hall.

'This has been no ordinary home-wreck,' thought he ; 'it needs but little imagination to picture to oneself the overflowing hospitality, the wild revelry, the old-world courtesy, that these crumbling walls have witnessed. Mark the great range of stabling ! For no ordinary carriage and pair, with couple of hacks only, were they needed, I trow. There you can still trace the shape and sweep of the avenue leading from the outer gate to the front entrance, and see where the broken bridge spanned the little brook ! A few glorious irregular orange-trees mark the place "where once a garden smiled." This was doubtless one of the great houses in the period which corresponded with the palmy days of the West Indian planters, with the old slave-holding times of the Sunny South, when money was plentiful and (compulsory) labour cheap ; when the magnates of the land held high festival, not periodically but as the rule of their daily life, and drank and danced and drove and dined and fought and feasted, all heedless of the morrow, whether in South Carolina, Jamaica, or in Sydney. The morrow *had* come during the lives of some proprietors. In other cases, not until

their heirs were fitted to realise the misery of a lost inheritance. And was this the end, the moral, of that *bon vieux temps*? The broken arch, the down-trodden shrubberies, the ghostly portals?’

By the time Mr. Neuchamp had brought his musings to a reluctant conclusion, the sun lay goldenly in the clear autumn eve, athwart the dark blue many-shadowed mountain-chain which rose with abrupt sternness from the broad green fertile levels. A wondrous clearness of atmosphere was manifest to the wayfarer from the misty mother-lands, now irradiated with the glories of a southern sunset. Tints of all hues and gradations of colour, clear unflecked amber, burning gold, purple, and orange, cast themselves in softly blending masses upon the fast darkening, solemn, unrelieved mountain-chain.

He was aware, from guide-book lore, that at this point the early progress of civilisation and prosperity of the struggling colony of New South Wales had come to an abrupt conclusion. All things which he saw around explained so much. Careful cultivation of land now disused and restored to grazing. A multiplication of small well-improved farms. Expensive and thorough clearing of timber from great tracts of indifferent soil, only explicable on the hypothesis of cheap labour and artificially heightened prices for all kinds of farm produce.

Then the end had come. The pent-up flocks and herds, the fall of the protection prices, dearth of employment for labour, the vigorous manhood of the colony native to the soil clamouring for remuneration and adventurous employment—all the causes, in fact, which lead to the decay of a weak or the development of a strong race.

One people, one ‘happy breed of men,’ in such straits and urgency, has ever found chiefs of its own blood capable of guiding it to death or victory. The time was come—the men were at hand—Wentworth, Lawson, and Blaxland, hereditary leaders, as belonging to the military aristocracy, and to the squirearchy of the land, stood forward and fronted the supreme crisis. Taking with them a scant equipment, they cast themselves into the interminable wilderness of barren rock and mountain, frowning precipice and barren heath, endlessly alternating with ‘horrible hopeless sultry dells’ for leagues, which no white man had hitherto measured or traversed.

The problem, upon the favourable solution of which hung the life of the infant settlement, was, whether a region lay beyond this pathless natural barrier, which in pasture alone should prove sufficiently extensive to sustain the flocks and herds so rapidly increasing in numbers and value.

It was a task difficult and dangerous beyond what, in this day of feather-bed travel, the imagination can easily reach. But the reward was splendid; and they, with hunger-sharpened features, barefooted and almost naked from contact with bush and brier, with the unshaken courage and dogged obstinacy to

the death, proper to their race, reached forth the strong right hand, seized, and held it fast.

For, after untold weary wanderings, with loss of burdened beasts, famine, doubt, and every hardship but that of divided counsels, they stood one day upon a mountain-top and saw stretched out before them the glory of the great unknown, untrodden, Austral interior, fated to be the pasture ground of millions of sheep and beeves and horses, the home of millions of Anglo-Saxons. A portion of this they saw when they sighted the first tract of richly grassed park-like forest, the first rippling river, the first prairie-like meadow.

The yet unfolded treasures of the boundless waste were doubtless seen in the spirit by the poet soul, the statesmanlike intellect, the patriotic heart of William Charles Wentworth.

Thus far the guide-book narrative, which perhaps Mr. Neuchamp partially recalled and revolved as he betook himself to the last of the older country towns of the land, which lay amid gardens and church spires on the nether side of the broad river, under the shadow of the ancient mountain superstition, now with 'hull riddled' by broadsides of steam, like other fallacies exploded by modern determination and the remorseless logic of the age.

On the morrow the pilgrim girded himself for the long ascent which plainly lay before him when he should cross the bridge and leave the cleared fertile vale.

Rising at an earlier hour than usual, he quitted the village inn before the sun had more than cleared the eastern horizon.

Ernest enjoyed in silent ecstasy the calm fresh beauty of the morn, as following the old road,—now winding round the spur of a mountain; now scarped from the hillside with a sheer fall of a thousand feet ere the tops of the trees could be beheld, which looked like brier-bushes at the bottom of the glen; now running with comparatively level measure along the plateau from which an endless vision of mountain, valley, and woodland was visible,—he gradually ascended to an elevation from which he was able to take a last glance at the rich lowlands through which the course of the river gleamed in long bright curves.

Mr. Neuchamp was a tolerable botanist, a rather more advanced geologist. He therefore possessed the unfading interest which he can ever ensure who reads with heaven-cleared eyes the book of nature. He was able to gratify both tastes without departing from the beaten track. Around, before, above him he beheld shrubs, forest trees, flowers, grasses, utterly unknown previously, but which from early reading he was enabled to recognise and classify. Every step along the sandstone slopes or heath-covered mountain-top was to him a joy, a surprise, an overflowing feast of new and pleasurable sensations.

Descending again from an elevation where the mountain

wind blew keenly, and the eagle soared from thunder-blasted giant eucalyptus adown the stupendous glen, at the sunless base of which lay an ever-gurgling rivulet of purest spring-fed water, he shouted aloud at the rare ferns which grew in unnoticed tender beauty where 'rivulets dance their wayward round.' He saw the deserted and rude appliances where the wandering miner had essayed to 'wash out' a modest deposit of the great conqueror, gold!

Then would he happen upon some long-disused, half-forgotten 'camp,' a half military station, where a subaltern had been stationed with some hundred convicts, whose forced labour made the road upon which he now so peaceably travelled.

There were the huts, here the great blocks of stone which they had hewn and raised from the quarry; there had been the triangles where, pah! the contumacious or luckless convict had the flesh cut from his back or much bemarked at least by that high official the government flogger. How wondrous grand the view, at morn and eve, before the eye of hopeless God-forsaken men, who in deliberate wrath and unendurable misery, cursed therefrom the day and the night, the moon and stars, the country, and every official from the gaoler to the governor. He gazed at the glorious cataract where the lonely water gathers its stray threads to fall like the lace tracery of a veil over the sullen spur. He saw the rock battlements and pinnacles, bright in the morning sun, against the rifted water-washed bases of which in long past ages the billows of an ancient sea had rolled and dashed. He saw the huge promontories which frowningly reared themselves on the verge of measureless abysses or obtruded their vast proportions and dizzy height into the boundless ocean of pale foliage which stretched, alternating but with sandstone peaks and masses, to the farthest horizon. From time to time he encountered men in charge of droves of horses and of cattle. These of necessity pursued the old and rugged road, not caring to use the swifter, costlier trainage. At first Mr. Neuchamp used to stand in the middle of the road, until he was warned by the fierce eyes and glancing horns of the cattle, and the extremely unreserved language of the accompanying stockmen, that he was violating etiquette and incurring danger.

Ever and anon he would halt as the warning steam-whistle heralded the approach of a locomotive, and marvel and muse as he saw the long train wind swiftly and securely adown or up the graded mountain side. He saw the half advancing, half receding series of approaches which at length land the travellers and the merchandise of the coast upon the pinnacles of the Australian Mont Cenis, and he thanked God, who had made him of one kindred with the men who had conquered nature, both in the land of his fathers which he had left and in the new land, a void and voiceless primeval forest but yesterday.

Much reflecting upon the overflowing *pabulum mentis* which had been spread before him on that day, Ernest was as grateful as a philosopher could be when he saw at the rather chilly approach of eve the outline of a building, faulty as a work of primitive art, as a specimen of any known order of architecture beneath contempt. It was the humble abode of one of the inn-keepers of a former *régime*, who had retained his lodgment upon the keen mountain plateau, and still smoked his pipe beside the roaring log fire in frosty winter nights. He now gathered russet pippins in his orchard, with an increasing sense of solvency, long after the last of the coaches had rattled away from his door to face the awful grades of the midnight mountain stage.

When, therefore, after a glorious day of intellectual exercise and frank bodily toil this most praiseworthy hostelry was reached, Mr. Neuchamp felt that fate had but small chance of doing him an injury on that particular night, had her intention been ever so unkind. He walked briskly up to the house, and was then and there taken in charge by a fresh-coloured, broad-shouldered, cheery individual, evidently the landlord, or a gross personal forgery of that functionary. He was promptly relieved of his knapsack, and lodged in the cleanest of bedrooms, with spoken and definite assurance of dinner.

‘I see you a-comin’ up the hill, with my glass, a good two miles off,’ said Boniface. ‘You see, sir, there ain’t no other place but mine for twenty mile good. So I made the old woman have everything handy for a spatchcock. *He* always liked a spatchcock. Many a time he’s been a furragin’ and a rummagin’ over every nook and cranny of these here mountains till he must have walked them blessed iron legs of his very near off. Ha, ha, ha! You’ll excuse me, sir; but when I see the knapsack, I took you for the Rev. Mr. Marke, the heminent-geeholler.’

‘Geologist, I suppose you mean,’ asserted Ernest. ‘Well, I hope you are not deeply disappointed; I am glad to find that there’s a man in Australia besides myself who is fond of using his legs.’

‘Bless your heart, sir, you’ll find when you’ve a been in the country a few years more’ (here Ernest contracted his brow) ‘that there’s a many gentlemen likes a goodish long walk when they can get a bit of a holiday. There’s Counsellor Burley, he thinks nothing of a twenty-mile walk out and in, nor his brother neither. They all comes up to me when they want to stretch their legs a bit. But I must see to your tea, sir.’

Mr. Neuchamp was partly interested in this record of pedestrianism other than his own. Nevertheless, he experienced a shade of disappointment at finding that he was not in such a glorious monopoly of tourist life as he had imagined. However, as he stretched his slipper-encased feet on either side of the great fireplace, in which burned a fire, which the keen, almost frosty mountain air made pleasant and necessary, he came to

the conclusion that 'none but the brave,' etc.; or, in other words, that no man who has not done a fair day's journey, upon his own legs, if possible, can thoroughly, intensely, comprehensively enjoy a well-cooked, well-served evening meal, like unto the spatchcock which immediately followed, and put a period to these reflections.

CHAPTER VI

It may be doubted whether a large proportion of what man is prone to call happiness is secured by any mortal, in so compressed and complete a form, as by the reasonably weary wayfarer during an evening spent in a cheery old-fashioned inn. The conditions of enjoyment are superbly complete. The body, healthily tired, craves utter repose, supplemented by the creature-comforts so plentifully accorded to a solvent lodger. The mind, ever a comparative reflex of the organic register of the body, is so far dominated as to lie luxuriously and ruminatively quiescent. The great ocean of the future, with possible armadas, Columbus discoveries, whirlpools, and typhoons, lies mist-shrouded and peaceful-murmurous. The mild lustre of fairly purchased present enjoyment is shed lamplike over the whole being. The difficult past, the uncertain future, are shut out from the mental view as completely as are the dark streets and stranger groups of a city, by shrouding curtains, when the interior life is alone visible. Care, save by improbable hazard, is thrust out till the morn. Till then the joys of unpalped appetite. Slumber, soft-touched, silent nurse, points with warning finger to the couch. Reverie may be fondled, darling nymph, without the rebuke of cold-eyed prudence. The wayfarer is a monarch for that evening only. His subjects haste to do his bidding. His purse contains a compressible coronet, investing him with regal dignity and absolute power, while the talisman coin is potent. Burly Sam Johnson loved 'to take his ease at an inn.' Was there an added luxury in the uncounted cups of tea therein possible, dissevered from the fear of accidents to Mrs. Thrale's table-cloth?

The supper had come and gone, and Mr. Neuchamp was sleepily watching the glowing embers in the fireplace with a strong mental deflection towards bed, when the pistol-crack of stock-whips, the lowing of cattle, and a faint echo of the far pervading British oath prepared him for a new and probably interesting arrival. His first impulse was to rush wildly into the road, in order to see a drove of cattle by moonlight, but having accidentally observed that the stockyard was very near

the house, he restrained himself and awaited the landlord's irrepressible report.

In a quarter of an hour that sympathetic personage, evidently the bearer of important news, entered the sitting-room.

'Hear the whip, sir? that was Ironbark Ike, with a couple o' hundred head of fat cattle of the () and Bar brand. Splendid lot. Rum character, old Ike; been a stockman and drover this fifty year. Like to see him, sir? he's a-smoking his pipe in the kitchen.'

Like to see him? Of course Mr. Neuchamp would like to see him, though he mildly assented, and did not betray the tremulous eagerness with which he mentally grasped the chance of beholding a stockman of half a century's experience, in his eyes little less than a sheik of the Bedaween.

Following his trusty host to the large smoke-blackened, old-fashioned kitchen, he saw a sinewy, grizzled old man, smoking an extremely black pipe by the fire, who turned a pair of spectral gleaming eyes upon him, and then resumed his position.

'Ike, this is a gentleman going up the country; he ain't been out long (Ike nodded expressively), and he wants your advice about buying a cattle station. He'd rather them nor sheep.'

'Sheep be blanked,' said the old man savagely. 'I should think not. Who the blank would walk at the tails of a lot of blank crawling sheep, when he could ride a good horse after a mob of thousand-weight bullocks, like I've got here to-night?'

'Mr. Landlord,' said Ernest, 'I should like a glass of grog. Won't Mr.—a—Ike, here, and yourself join me?'

The refreshment was not declined, and having been produced, Ike abandoned his pipe and proceeded to expound the law as regarded cattle—wild, tame, fat, store, branded and unbranded, broken-in, or 'all over the country'—in an oracular tone, suggestive of experiences and adventure far beyond the reach of ordinary men.

'Travelled this line? ah! You remember me a fairish time, Joe; but I've been along these ranges and gullies with stock long before the old road was finished, when you were sure to meet more than *one* bushranger, and had to carry your grub and camp for weeks together. Many a queer drive I've had on this very track. They had no steamers fizzin' up and down the rocks then, takin' sheep and cattle behind 'em, all mashed up together in boxes like so many herrin's. It took a *man* to bring a mob of fat bullocks from the Lower Castlereagh or the Macquarie, let alone the Narran, in them days.'

'I suppose you had some roughish trips them days,' suggested the host.

'You may swear that, Joe,' affirmed the war-worn stockman, with a grim contortion of his facial muscles; 'take the book in your right hand, as they say, when you are in the "jump-up." Here,' added he, as he swallowed his brandy at a gulp, and made a sign to the landlord, 'fetch in another round, if this gentle-

man here ain't too proud, and I'll tell you a yarn about drivin' cattle—one you don't hear every day.'

The replenished glasses reappeared, and the veteran of the 'spur, the bridle, and the well-worn *brand*,' having filled his pipe and partly emptied his glass, made a commencement.

'It was a matter of thirty years ago, or more ; I was a young chap then and pretty flash, knowed my work, and wasn't afraid of man, beast, or devil. Well, I'd got a biggish mob of fat stock for them days—there was no ten thousand head on any man's run then—and a rough time we'd had of it. It had rained every day since we started. We'd had to swim every river and every creek as we come to, and watch for the first fortnight, all night long, with the horses' bridles in our hands.'

'I suppose they were rather wild cattle?' inquired Mr. Neuchamp, sipping his brandy and water distrustfully.

Ironbark Ike bent a searching look upon his interrogator before he answered.

'Wild? Well, I suppose you might call 'em that, and make no mistake. They'd come off a very far out-run, where they'd been, as one might say, neglected. Never see a yard for years, some on 'em. They was that wild, that as we drove along, if they came to the fresh track of a "footman," they'd stop and smell it and paw the ground and roar for ever so long. We'd hard work to get 'em by it. As to seein' people on foot, there wasn't much of that ; and any travellers they kept clear enough of us, if they'd ever heard of the DD cattle.

'Well, we'd dodged them along pretty fair, that is me and a Narran black boy and a young Fish River native chap, that was pretty nigh as unbroken as the black boy ; he could ride the best, but the black boy had twice as much savey.'

'Some o' them darkies is pretty smart,' interposed the host, gradually becoming less respectful to his ancient guest, of whom he apparently stood in considerable awe.

'Smartest chaps ever I had on the road was blackfellows when they're wild ; as long as they can ride a bit, the wilder the better, and get 'em off their own ground, then they're afraid to bolt.'

'I should have supposed when they have had the benefit of education they would have been more valuable assistants,' mildly asserted Mr. Neuchamp.

'Ruins 'em, bodily and teetotally,' asserted Ike, with iron decision. 'No educated blackfellow was ever worth a curse. But tame or wild they've all one fault, and it drops 'em in the end.'

'Indeed, how singular!' said Ernest, 'how strange that this sub-variety of the human race should have one pronounced weakness ! And what may it be?'

'Drink!' shouted the veteran, draining his glass. 'We can do another round, Joe. Never knew one of 'em that didn't take to drink, sooner or later ; and, in course that cooked 'em,' he added, with an impressive moral air.

'Sure to do,' echoed the landlord, appearing with fresh rummers.

'I have no doubt,' assented Mr. Neuchamp blandly, but much in the dark as to the real nature of the culinary process described.

'Well,' proceeded Mr. Isaac, settling himself calmly down to his fourth tumbler, 'where was I? with those blank cattle, oh! at the top of the road where it used to make in, at the top of Mount Victoria. By gum! it makes me feel as if there was no rheumatism in these blessed old bones of mine when I think how we rode all that blessed day. All the night before we'd been on our horses, round and round the cattle, in a scrub full of rocks; it rained in buckets and tubs, thundering and lightning, and pitch dark; and I, knowing that if the cattle broke loose, we'd never see half of 'em again.'

'Why, bless my soul!' ejaculated Mr. Neuchamp, completely dislodged from his previous conviction that cattle were a more pleasing and interesting description of stock than sheep, 'how did you ever succeed in keeping them?'

'We did keep 'em, and that's about all I know,' responded the fierce drover of other days. '*How* we did it the devil only knows. I swore enough that night for him to lend a hand, if he's on for such fakes, as some says. I rode slap into Tin Pot, the black boy, once, taking him for an old cow, and Tommy Toke, the white lad, ran against a tree and knocked one of his horse's eyes clean out. Well, daylight came at last, and we had the cattle at our own price, blast 'em. All day they was very sulky and slinged along, and wouldn't feed. Well, we was sulky too, for we'd no time to stop and cook a bite, it was so thick.'

'What started 'em so?' inquired the landlord; 'they'd had a deal of camping before they came so far.'

'God knows!—a kangaroo or a bear, or they saw a ghost or a blackfellow—something we couldn't see; and once they were fairly up, the devil himself wouldn't get them to settle again. Now I knew a first-rate camp two or three miles from the bottom of this here hill, almost as good as a yard, but with a bit of feed and water in, a regular wall of rock all round; one man, with a fire, could keep 'em first-rate. So my dart was to get to this place, and I was looking forward to a bit of hot damper and a warm quart or two of tea, with a quiet smoke.

'Just as I thinks of this we turned the corner, and there, in the narrowest part of the road, was a road gang, as they call it, a goodish crowd of chained convicts makin' believe to mend the road, with a party of soldiers to look after 'em and a young officer to look after the soldiers, and a white-whiskered, hard-hearted old rascal of a corporal to look after *him*.

'The corporal was a-walking up and down, on guard, backwards and forwards, very stiff and solemn. There'd been a chap bolted (and shot dead, too) the night afore, so he had on a bit of extra pipeclay

'Our mob propped, dead—the cattle and Tin Pot and Tommy Toke—at what they'd never seen afore. Now we couldn't give the party the go-by anyhow, unless they went into their huts.'

'Why not?' asked Mr. Neuchamp, deeply interested.

'Because the mountain was like the side of a house above the road, and fell straight down below five hundred feet, like a sea-cliff. There was just that chain or two of level track, and that was all. I goes up to the corporal, "I say, mate," says I, "can't you get your canaries off the track here for about a quarter of an hour, and let my mob of cattle pass?"

'He looks at me, turning his eyes, but not his head, and keeps on marching up and down like a blessed image; all he says was, "Make an application to the officer in command," says he.

'So I looks about, and presently I sees a slight-built young fellow, in a shell jacket, lounging about a tent.

"'Scuse me, captain," says I, "will you order your men to leave off their work (work, thinks I) and keep the road clear while I get my cattle past? They're awful wild, and won't face the track with all these chaps in yellow and black and leg-irons. They never see a road gang before."

"What extraordinary cattle for New South Wales!" said the young fellow, "I should say there was plenty of room between the men and the hill. Can't move her Majesty's troops nor the industrious gang before six o'clock."

'By —, I *was* mad. If we couldn't get the cattle by with the light, we ran the risk of their breaking before we got to camp and having another night like last night over again. It *was* hard! I ground my teeth as I went back and passed the corporal, walking up and down with his confounded musket.

'When I got past him I saw the cattle staring and looking hard, drawn up a good deal closer. The two boys were very sulky at the notion of another night watching and riding, with scarce anything to eat for twenty-four hours. So was I, when I thought of the long cold hours if we didn't make our camp.

'Suddenly an idea came into my head; I see something as give me a notion. "Tommy Toke," says I, "you look out to back up and keep the tail of the mob going, if they make a rush. Tin Pot, you keep on the upper side, and look out they don't break back. They're a-going to make a — charge."

'What started me on this plan all of a sudden, was this wise. We had an old blue half-bred buffalo cow and her son, a four-year-old black bullock, in the mob; he followed his mother, as they will do sometimes. He was a regular pebble, and the old cow hadn't been in a yard since he was branded. She was the biggest tigress ever I see; that's sayin' something. Well, I see the old Roosian paw the ground now and then, and keep drawing towards the corporal, as was marchin' up and down same as he was in Buckingham Palace.

'I keep watching the old cow drawin' and drawin', and

pawin' and pawin'. He thought she might be a milker. Suddenly she gives a short bellow, makes for the corporal at the rate of forty miles an hour, followed by the black bullock, and the mob behind him.

'The first thing I saw was the corporal a-flyin' in the air one way, his musket another, and the cow, the black bullock, and the whole of the mob charging through the soldiers and the road gang.

"Back up, boys," I roared, "keep them going!" as we swept through the party; soldiers running one way, the convicts, poor beggars, making their chains rattle again in their hurry to get safe away. That was a time! I saw the young soldier-officer capsized on to one of his men. Such a smash I never see; it was all downhill luckily. Away we went at the tail of the mob, galloping for our lives, and soon left red coats and yellow trousers, muskets and leg-irons, far behind us. Luckily the mob was too wild to break, and before sundown we were miles from the bottom of the hill, and had the cattle safe inside of the rock-wall camp, where we had a good feed and a night's sleep, both of which we wanted bad enough.'

'I'll be bound you did,' assented the landlord, 'it's a hard life, is a stockman's—out in all weathers, and risking your life, as one might say.'

'Life?' said the saturnine, grizzled old land-pirate, who had apparently relapsed into a different train of thought; 'what's a man's life in this country; leastways used to be. Here!' roared he, dashing his hand upon the table, 'bring in a bottle of brandy, Joe, and a kettle of water, and I'll tell you a yarn about old days as 'll make your hair curl, unless this here gentleman's ashamed to drink with old Ike?'

Mr. Neuchamp had by this period of the evening made the discovery that he had invoked a fiend that he was unable to lay; as the old stockman glared at him with half-infuriate, half-imploping eyes, while putting his last observation into the form of a question, he felt much inclined to defy and refuse his uncomfortable boon companion. But having evaded the implied obligation to drink so far he thought it expedient to comply, partly from the novelty of the experience, partly from his dislike to a possible quarrel.

'Ha!' said the strange old man, as he half filled his tumbler with the powerful spirit, and stirred the heavy red glowing logs in the stone fireplace till they shot up a shower of sparks, and threw out a fierce heat like the mouth of a furnace; 'fine thing is a fire! that put me in mind of it. Fill up, curse ye! Joe, ye old, half-baked Jimmy. It was over on the Dervent side, afore I came here at all, that two chaps as did a good deal on the cross, that's how it was told me, was a-skinning' a bullock in a gully, as had only one end to it.'

'What do you mean by that?' inquired Mr. Neuchamp. 'Surely——'

'I mean,' impatiently broke in the narrator, 'as you could run stock in at one end, and if they got high up they found a wall of rock at the far end, and they couldn't well get back, it was so tarnation narrow. Now do you savey? They were the only coves as knew the secret of it in that part, and many a beast, and many a colt and filly—horses was horses then—they branded or put away there. Well, as I was saying, they wasn't two very particular chaps, and they was a-skinning' of a bullock, having previously killed him; there warn't no doubt of that, as the head was on the ground close by with a bullet hole not very far off the curl. Similarly it was a "cross" beast. No mistake about that either. The hide, three-parts off, showed the RX brand; one that belonged to H., one of the largest stockholders in the island, and a man who would prosecute any man as dared touch his property, to the gallows, if he could get him there. No hope of mercy from *him*. They had no right to take the bullock, of course it was felony, and now they were caught red-handed by this chap—Pretty Jack—he was the ugliest man in the island, and he was going to turn informer. He grinned when he came up. "There's my liberty," says he, pointing to the beast; "I'm sorry for you, boys," says he, "but every man for himself." The men looks at one another, then at him; he had 'em in his hand; they saw the courthouse crammed, and heard the judge pass the sentence, a heavy one of course, for a second colonial conviction. They heard the gaol door clang as they were shut in for the long infernal years which would bring 'em nearly, if not quite, to the end of a man's life. Some of this sort these two chaps *had* tasted before; they shuddered and trembled when they thought of it, and the man who was to do all this by his own willing informing was their own friend and fellow-prisoner; an accomplice, too, in a goodish lot of undiscovered crimes. He sat looking at the beast with a stupid grin on his ugly face. They looked at each other. Then one man walked past him on the track, and stopped. When he saw this man's eyes, and the murder written there, he called out, "For God's sake, don't kill me, mates; it was all in joke, I never meant to inform on you." But it was too late—they were too much afraid of their own lives to trust them to him; besides their anger had been kindled against the man who had been an accomplice, and was now an informer. "All right, Jack," called out one of the men, "help us to get off this hide." He did so nervously, and anxious to curry favour. The hide was soon stripped, and as they turned to make some joking remark, one of them struck him over the head with a heavy piece of wood. The wretched fool fell on his knees groaning bad enough.

"Oh, my God!—Charley," said he, in his agony, "what's this about?—you won't really hurt me? for the love of God, for the sake of my wife and the young ones, pity me; I never meant it, God above knows."

"Nonsense, man," said one of them, 'we ain't a-going to hurt

ye ; we're only a-goin' to stitch ye up in this here hide a bit, to keep ye from gabbin' while we're putting this bullock away. Now lie still, or by — I'll poleaxe you."

'He laid quiet, thinking he would soon be let go, and while the men laced him up in the hide, making eyelet-holes, and running thongs of hide through, which made it fit pretty close, he thought he might lie for a few hours, and then the people from the next place would find him, and let him go free.

'The men cut up the bullock. They lighted a large fire and put the head, offal, and feet upon it ; they packed part of it on a wheelbarrow. Then they hung a strong green-hide rope between the two trees above the fire ; one said something to the other in a low growling tone ; he shook his head, but at last they came towards the bound-up wretch ; he was not able to stir, in course, but it *was* pitiful—my God, so it was, to see his eyes move like an animal's in a trap, as the men went up to him.

"For God's sake, men, spare me," he moaned out.

"Spare you?" said the oldest of 'em ; "spare a man who betrays his own pals, and sells his fellow-men for a miserable ticket-of-leave? Damn you!" he roared, "your time's up, if you had a dozen lives. Here, Ike."

'Between them they raised him, lifted him in their arms, and hung him up by the rope actually across the roaring fire. The wet hide protected him for a bit, but when the fire began to take effect his shrieks (they told me) was that horrid and unnatural that they had to stop their ears.

'There they stopped till the shrieks died away in death. How he writhed and screamed, and prayed and cursed, and wept and struggled like a maniac. But the tough hide held through everything, though he wrenched it as if he could break an iron band. It was a long while to watch the tongues of the flame dart up as inside the black sheet still writhed a shuddering, howling form. It couldn't have been much like a man's at last. Then all the noise died away, and the bag hung steady and still.'

'And did the fiends who perpetrated this awful deed escape punishment?' asked Ernest.

'Well, I don't know about 'scaping punishment,' said the ancient colonist, looking somewhat like one of Morgan's buccaneers, questioned as to the retribution, moral or otherwise, that followed the sack of Panama, 'but they got clear off, and it was years afterwards that a half-burnt hide with a skeleton inside was found near the old camp.'

'And did the principal criminal never suffer remorse?' still inquired Ernest, with horror in every tone ; 'are such men suffered by God to live?'

At that moment the fire blazed up ; a change, wonderful and dread, came over the face of the old stockman. He started up ; his eyeballs glared like those of a maniac ; every muscle, every

feature was convulsed. 'Who talks of murderers? They? He? I did it. I, Bill Murdock, and the devil. *He* was there; I see him grinning by the fire now. Ha, ha! I can hear *his* screams, my God, my God! as I've heard 'em every day since. I hear 'em now. I shall hear 'em in hell! Look!'

So speaking, with eyes protruding, with every facial nerve and muscle quivering with horror and unspeakable dread, he pointed towards the fireplace, as one who sees the approach of a form, horrible, unavoidable, unearthly. Then, gasping and shuddering, he fell prone and heavily to the floor, without an effort to save himself.

The landlord approached and loosened his handkerchief. 'It's partly the grog,' he whispered to Ernest. 'Nobody can say how much brandy and how much truth's mixed up in this here yarn; but he's seen some rough work in his day, has Ike—though I never see him like this before. Thank you, sir; I can get him to bed now.'

Mr. Neuchamp promptly sought *his* couch, deciding that he had come in for a much larger dose of the sensational element than he had counted upon, and doubting whether he should repeat the experiment.

When he awoke, after a heavy but perturbed slumber, the sun was up, and his first question was of the welfare of the strange old stockman.

'Gone, hours ago, sir. He just slept till nigh hand daylight, and then he roused out his men, lets the cattle out of the yard, and off he goes.'

'And was he able to sit on his horse,' was Mr. Neuchamp's very natural question, 'after drinking a bottle of brandy and having a fit?'

'A deal better nor we could, I expect, sir. He's ironbark right through, that old Ike. Takes a deal to kill the likes of him.'

'Apparently so,' assented Ernest. 'What wonderful energy, what indomitable resolution must he possess! Used in a better cause, what results might such a man not have reached! "Tis pity of him," as the Douglas said of Marmion, who in this century, instead of that in which Flodden was fought, might have adorned a colony too, if there had been any one to lay the information, "for that he did feloniously and unlawfully obtain the custody of one young lady," etc. etc., anent that forged letter. Heigh ho! I don't feel quite as much in the humour for walking to-day as I did yesterday. Still, it's a case of Excelsior, I suppose. *En avant*, Neuchamp! St. Newbold inspire thy son and servant.'

CHAPTER VII

WHEN Mr. Neuchamp looked around, after completing his toilette, the scene strongly stirred his imaginative mind ; it was unique, unfamiliar, and majestic. At his feet, down the long incline of the mountain, lay the vast foreign-foliaged, primeval forests, the silver-threaded, winding rivulets, the hoary crag-ramparts of yesterday's travel shrouded in billowing, rolling mists, or rich in combination of light and shade, colour and effect, and at the bidding of the morning sunbeam. As far as vision extended, nought but these characteristic features of the mountain wilderness was visible. Immediately around him, however, were decisive though humble evidences of the domination of art over nature. The inn orchard, with its autumn-blushing apples, stables, barn-yard, the cheerful smoking chimneys in the 'eager air'—all these told of the limited but absolute sway of civilised man. Ernest's ideas gradually shaped themselves into the concrete fact of breakfast.

After this luxurious meal Mr. Neuchamp felt his ardour for travel and exploration rekindle. He inquired the road from the landlord and boldly pushed on. Much the same fortune attended him, sometimes traversing rugged and barren country, and at other times finding cottages, farms, and orchards upon his route. When, however, he reached the more open forest lands, he found that a portion of the carefully graded highway was in process of being metalled. Here were many parties of stonebreakers at work by contract, apparently preferring such labour to the more monotonous daily wage.

Asking for water at one small camp, he found in the cook a well-mannered youngster, doubtless a gentleman. Ernest was pressed to take more substantial refreshment, but he declined the offer.

'How far do you think of going to-day ?' inquired the affable stone-compeller.

'About half a dozen miles,' replied Mr. Neuchamp, who by this time had completed the chief portion of a fair day's trudge.

'My reason for asking,' continued the basaltic one, 'is, that

we are going to have a little dinner at an inn just so far distant. The party consists of my mates—very decent fellows—and our superintendent, who is a regular brick. We shall be glad if you will join us.’

‘Most happy indeed,’ answered Ernest, especially gratified to enter upon a new phase of life utterly outside of his previous experiences, and perhaps more typically Australian than anything he could have stumbled upon except by the merest accident. He had dined in many queer places and met with strange company in his day, being always ready to extend his observations in the interest of philosophical inquiry, but a dinner of persons who broke stones upon a highroad for their subsistence, and who were presumably gentlemen, he had never yet been so fortunate as to hear of, much less to partake of.

‘If you don’t mind waiting half an hour,’ pursued the Amphytrion, ‘while I change my clothes, we can walk down comfortably together.’

‘Are you in the habit of having these little dinners to solace your rather austere labours?’ inquired Ernest.

‘Well, not exactly. Though we have not been so very uncomfortable here for the last six months. We are all gentlemen, in our party, out of luck; and a man might do worse, who is young and strong, than earn six shillings a day by fair downright labour, in a cool climate. All we have to do is to pile up so many yards of metal for the road superintendent to measure. When he “passes it” our money is safe, and we are as independent as le Roi d’Yvelôt. We live comfortably, smoke our pipes in the evening, sleep unusually well, and enjoy real rest on Sundays. But “little dinners” are expensive, and there would be a slight probability of some of the party going “on the burst,” after three or four months’ teetotalism.’

‘On the burst? I do not quite follow.’

‘On the burst,’ explained the colonist, ‘vernacular signifying a protracted and utterly reckless debauch. It’s an Australian malady. Hope you’ll never be in the way of infection. But as good men as either of us have got inoculated and never wholly recovered. Now, the occasion of this entertainment, which is given by me,’ continued the metalician, ‘is, like Mr. Weller’s new suit of clothes, a “very partic’ler and uncommon ewent.” Fact is, I’ve been left a few thousand pounds by a good-for-nothing old uncle of mine in England, who never gave me so much as a shilling knife all his life, and is now gone to glory, and with all his earthly goods me endowed, much against the grain. And so I’m going to Sydney by the coach to-morrow, and home by mail steamer on Monday after. What do you think of that for a lark?’ inquired he, giving a leap, and shying his hat into the air with a schoolboy joyousness much at variance with his previously imperturbable demeanour.

‘I think it’s a very pleasant story, with a capital ending,’ said Ernest, ‘and that’s a great matter. I don’t suppose the

stonebreaking has done you any harm, except roughening your hands a little.'

'Not a bit in the world—a good deal the other way. I was a lazy young scamp while my money lasted. Now I can do a man's work, know personally what a day's labour actually is, and shall respect (and be able slightly to check) the task of the born labourer all my life after. Here we are at the inn.'

Thus talking, they arrived at the inn, a roomy and respectable hotel, where the up coach and the down daily met and deposited hungry passengers, who were accommodated with hasty but highly-priced meals. Here they were met by the landlord, a civil and capable personage, who inducted them into bedrooms, and shortly after into a snug private parlour, where, with considerable splendour of glass, flowers, and table-linen, preparation for the dinner was partially made.

Here Mr. Neuchamp found several gentlemen-like men, in tweed morning costume. Before long the superintendent appeared. Ernest was introduced by his new friend. The conversation became general, and within a reasonable time dinner was announced.

This repast was exceedingly well served, cooked, and, it may be added, appreciated. The wines were fair, and so was the drinking, though within the bounds of discretion.

Subjects of general interest and of political bearing were discussed in a manner which showed that the *pabulum mentis* had not been lost sight of, toils notwithstanding. The health of their friend, 'who by an unexpected, but by no means unkind, freak of Fortune—a divinity of whom they all had previous experience—was about to be translated to a happier hemisphere,' was suitably proposed and responded to; as was the health of their excellent superintendent, who, a father to them in counsel and admonition, had always treated them as gentlemen, though temporarily filling unpretending positions.

Lastly was toasted the health of the gentleman who had done them the honour to join the entertainment, at the invitation of their old friend and comrade. The speaker trusted that 'their honoured guest, not very long since a resident in dear old Ireland, or England—sure it was all one—would not immediately be reduced, he meant impelled, to make choice of their healthy, manly, but somewhat monotonous occupation. It was well enough in its way. He, Brian O'Loughlan, was not there to find fault with an honourable means of subsistence. But he trusted that his young friend would make trial of other colonial avocations, before betaking himself to the geological experiments in which they had been lately engaged. Of course he had it to fall back upon. And if ever necessity compelled him, he spoke the sentiments, he felt sure, of every man at the table when he said that they would be charmed to welcome their esteemed though but lately acquainted friend to their in-

dependent, industrious, and ancient order of free and accepted stonebreakers.' (Continued applause.)

This toast, to which Ernest 'briefly but feelingly' responded, expressing his 'admiration of the institutions of a country which permitted access to industrial occupations generally esteemed as close guilds and corporations in Europe, to gentlemen of culture and refinement, such as his host and his friends whom he saw around him that day, without detriment to their social position and prospects,' closed the entertainment.

The fortunate legatee and his comrades departed to seek their tent, while Ernest and the superintendent remained and smoked a pipe together (the latter gentleman, at least, indulging in the narcotic), while they talked over the somewhat exceptional circumstances of the entertainment, and the accidental stroke of luck which had occasioned it.

On the following morning they breakfasted together in much comfort, and then separated, as so many pleasant chance comrades are compelled to do in this life. The Government official drove off in his buggy to visit another line of road, while Mr. Neuchamp, full of hope and rich with the gathered spoils of his late adventure, paced cheerily along the high road to fortune and the mystical desert interior.

Halting at mid-day by a watercourse favourably situated for temporary rest and refreshment, he heard the half-forgotten words of a favourite operatic air trolled forth by a rich voice with unusual effect and precision. Looking round for the performer, he descried, lying under a noble casuarina tree, the roots of which spread halfway across the little creek, a tall man, whose worn and somewhat shabby habiliments were strongly at variance with the distinction of his air and the aristocratic cast of his features. Beside him was a small black camp kettle, from which he had been preparing the usual traveller's refreshment of 'quartpot tea.' He was smoking, of course, and as he half raised himself and saluted Ernest, that observer of human nature thought he had rarely seen a more striking countenance.

'In which direction are you travelling?' inquired Mr. Neuchamp.

'Towards Nubba,' said the unknown, 'and a devilish dull track it is. Do you happen, by any chance, to be going there?'

'My route lies past that place, I believe. As we are both apparently on a walking tour we may as well be fellow-travellers, if you have no objection.'

'Most happy, I am sure,' assented the stranger, with the ease of a man of the world; 'one so rarely has the pleasure of having a gentleman for a comrade in this part of the creation. May I offer you some tea? Sorry to say my flask is empty.'

'Many thanks—I prefer the tea. Perhaps, on the other hand, you will make trial of part of my provender?'

Here Mr. Neuchamp exhibited an ample store of solids, which he had had the foresight to bring with him, and the stranger, after

observing that the brisk air gave one a most surprising appetite, made so respectable a meal that he would almost have fancied that tea and tobacco had alone composed that repast which he had just finished.

The mid-day halt over, the newly-made acquaintances took the road with great cheerfulness, and, on Ernest's part, a considerable accession of spirits.

'Here,' thought he, 'is one of those happy *contretemps* that so rarely occur—out of books—in an old country. There, if you did meet a man, under these circumstances, you would be afraid to speak to him until you had actually gauged his social position and standing. Here, now, is a gentleman evidently of culture, travel, refinement, who, like me, prefers from time to time to lead this half-gipsy, half-hunter life entirely for the pleasure of unconventional sensations.'

For the first hour or two Mr. Neuchamp kept up a sustained cross-fire of conversation with this fortunately found travelling companion. Whether formerly in the army or not he did not definitely state, but from certain of his reminiscences and stray sentences, such as 'when we took Acre,' Mr. Neuchamp thought he was not far wrong in assigning him a military rank. Certainly his experiences were extensive. Had been everywhere, had seen everything, knew all the colonies from Northern Queensland to South Australia, the gold-fields, the stations, the cities, the law courts. How lightly and airily did he touch upon these different localities and institutions. Knew London, Paris, Vienna, Florence, Rome, St. Petersburg. The *haute volée* of many cities knew him well evidently. His whole tone and bearing denoted so much; and with an air half of philosophical unconcern, half of humorous complaint against fate, he confessed that he had not been lucky.

'No!' he said, 'they used to say in the old 108th I was too deuced lucky in everything else to hold honours where the stakes were golden; and so it has been with me ever since. The boy who ran up the whole score of social success before his beard was grown, the man whom princesses fought for, and world famed diplomats, soldiers, and savants flattered, has ended thus: to find himself growing old in a colony where talent and social rank are mocked at if unassociated with vulgar success; and here stands John Lulworth Broughton, without a friend, a coin, or a home wherein to lay his head.'

'You shall never need repeat that indictment against fate,' cried Ernest enthusiastically; 'I, at least, can discriminate between the talents and the qualities which should have controlled success and the temporary obscurity which ill-fortune has accorded. Trust to me in the future. Is there no enterprise which we could engage in jointly, where, with my capital and your experience, we might work with mutual advantage?'

The stranger's haughty features assumed a different expres-

sion at the mention of the word capital, and his melancholy dark eye brightened as he said promptly—

‘I know a splendid run, not very far from where we stand, large enough and good enough to make any man’s fortune. I have been prevented from occupying it hitherto by want of funds, but a hundred pounds would pay all expenses at present. We could then take it up from Government, and it would bring in, half-stocked, two or three thousand a year almost at once.’

‘Not far from here—the very thing!’ exclaimed Mr. Neuchamp, who had had nearly enough walking. ‘But I thought that all the good land was taken up except what was a long way off.’

The stranger explained that by a lucky accident he had been trusted with the secret of this magnificent country, which you entered by a narrow and well-concealed gorge; that the old stockman was dead who discovered it, and that a beautiful, open, parklike country, whenever you got through the gorge, was waiting to reward the first fortunate occupants who were liberal enough to meet the small but indispensable preliminary disbursement.

Mr. Neuchamp thought he could see here a splendid opportunity of at once making a rapid fortune, of demonstrating a rare perception of local opportunity and judicious speculation, and of proving to Mr. Frankston and to Antonia his ability to control colonial circumstances without a novitiate.

He could imagine old Paul saying, ‘Well, Antonia, my pet, you see this young friend of ours has shown us all the way. Here it is, in the *Herald*: “Splendid discovery of new country, by E. Neuchamp, Esq. Large area taken up by the explorer and partner. We must congratulate Mr. Neuchamp, who has not been, we believe we are correct in stating, many months in Australia, upon developing a masterly grasp of judicious pastoral enterprise, which has left the majority of our older colonists in the shade.”’

After this and other intoxicating presentiments, it was finally agreed that they were to proceed to Nubba, where Ernest was to hand Mr. Broughton his cheque for a hundred pounds for outfit and preliminary expenses, upon which that gentleman would at once proceed to point out and put him in possession of this long-concealed but none the less virgin and glorious Eldorado.

With head erect and flashing eye, in which sparkled the ideal lustre of imminent wealth and distinction, Ernest walked on towards the small village which Mr. Broughton had indicated as their probable destination for the night. That accomplished individual indeed, pedestrian feats in the Oberland, South America, Norway, and Novogorod notwithstanding, found it difficult to keep up with his future partner—his boots, possibly, which were neither new nor apparently calculated to withstand the wear and tear of rough country work, prevented his attaining a high rate of speed. But had Ernest been less preoccupied

he might have marked a sour expression upon the aristocratic features, heard a savage oath, vernacularly vulgar, issue from under the silken moustache.

Soon, however, in a break of his fairy tale, while he was deciding whether he should send his brother Courtenay a cheque for ten thousand pounds, or surprise him with a personal proffer of that amount as a Christmas box, he became aware that he was outpacing his companion from whom this golden tide of fortune was to date and issue. He stopped and permitted him to come up. At the same instant a horseman, in the plain but unmistakable uniform of a police trooper, rode at speed from the angle of the forest track, and overtook them.

Pulling up his well-bred horse rather suddenly, he fixed a keen and searching glance upon the pair. His features gradually relaxed into a familiar and disrespectful expression as he addressed Mr. Broughton.

'Why, Captain! what's come to you? Here's the whole force in a state of mobilisation from Hartly to the Bogan about the last little plant of yours—and now here you are, a-walking into our very arms, like a blessed 'possum into a blessed trap—why I'm ashamed of you; hold up your hands.'

Mr. Neuchamp gazed upon the face of his illustrious friend as this vulgar exordium was rattled off by the flippant but practical man-at-arms, in wonder, consternation, sorrow, and expectancy.

Could it be anything but the most annoying and inexplicable of mistakes, and would not this noble-minded victim of blind fortune repudiate the shameful accusation with scorn in every line of the stern sad features?

He gazed long and fixedly into that face; a deeply graven expression *was* there. But it was an alien, unsatisfactory expression. It showed slight contempt, but habitual deference to that branch of the civil power mingled with a sardonic half-stoical, half-despairing resignation to ignoble circumstance.

Puzzled, doubtful, but by no means dismayed, Mr. Neuchamp indignantly asked the trooper what he meant by speaking insolently to his friend, Mr. Broughton—in stopping him without a warrant upon the highway?

'Mr. Howard, alias Captain, alias the Knight of Malta, alias the Aide-de-Camp, alias John Lulworth Broughton, is as much my friend as yours; leastwise we know one another better; don't we, Captain?'

Mr. Broughton, upon whose wrists the handcuffs were safely adjusted, merely nodded, upon which the trooper requested Mr. Neuchamp to permit his hands to be similarly fettered.

'What?' said Ernest, flushing so suddenly, at the same time making a stride forward, that the wary official backed his horse, and taking out his revolver, presented it full at his head.

'What for?' said the trooper, 'why on suspicion, of course, of being concerned with the Captain here, in the Barrabri bank

robbery the other night, that all the country is going mad about.'

Here the Captain found his tongue.

'You're going mad yourself, Taylor ; the reward and the mobilisation, as you call it, have been too much for you. There's no evidence against me this time, nothing that you could call evidence worth a rap ; and don't you see that this is a gentleman just out from home, and green as grass ; or he wouldn't go on foot with a thundering big knapsack on his back, picking up with—ahem—shady characters like me.'

'That's all very well, Captain,' assented the trooper ; 'but the cove's hair and complexion, and height, and age, as was with you in the plant, and *Police Gazette*, corresponds with the other prisoner's.'

Ernest's face, at this description of himself, was a study ; so sharply engraved were the lines which indicated wrath, disgust, and horror.

'Very sorry, my man, and all that,' continued Senior-Constable Taylor, who had not got the stripes for nothing, 'in case your turn don't square, but you must come before the police magistrate of Boonamarran and see what *he* thinks about it. I won't put the darbies on ye, if you'll promise to come quietly, but by — if you leave the track for a moment I'll send a bullet through you before you can say knife.'

Under this proclamation of martial law, there was nothing to be done by any sane man but to submit ; so Ernest made answer that he had no objection to walking as far as Boonamarran, where no doubt his innocence would be made clear.

In a kind of procession, therefore, was Ernest Neuchamp forced, as the Captain would have said, 'by circumstances' to make his appearance in the small but not wholly unimportant town of Boonamarran. As they passed up the principal street, a very large proportion of the available inhabitants must have assembled to mark their arrival at the lock-up.

Behind them rode the trooper with a mingled air of inflexible determination and successful daring. The Captain marched in front with his manacled hands almost disguised by his careless walk, remarking calmly on the appearance of the town, which he criticised freely, also the leading inhabitants. By his side, burning with rage and mortification, walked Ernest, feeling very like a galley slave, and wondering whether there was any possibility, in this strange land, of being sentenced mistakenly to a term of imprisonment. Thus feeling for the first time a keen sensation of distrust for his own obstinate predilections, coupled with an awakening respect for the opinion of others, the time passed in varieties of mental torture, till they arrived at the lock-up, a strong wooden building, into a small room of which they were unceremoniously bundled, while a heavy bolt closed behind them.

'I really am extremely sorry, sir,' quoth the Captain, after

they were left to themselves, 'to have brought you into this highly unpleasant position. But circumstances, my lifelong enemies, were too strong for me; and for you, too,' he added reflectively.

Mr. Neuchamp was not a vain man, though proud; above everything he was a philosophical experimentalist. Under any given position he could soon have ceased to struggle and rage, and have commenced to analyse, theorise, and deduce.

'I ought to be so justly enraged with you,' he replied, 'that any apologies would only arouse contempt. You have deceived me, it appears, with a view to rob me of my money, and you have been instrumental in causing, for the first time in my life, the loss of my liberty. But I will confine myself for the present to asking, in all seriousness, why you, a man of culture and mental endowments, having enjoyed the advantages of travel and refined society, should voluntarily have lowered yourself to your present surroundings by a course of vulgar and short-sighted criminality?'

'Well, I'll tell you the real naked truth, as far as I know it when I see it,' said the Captain, cutting off a solid piece of negrohead tobacco and putting it into his mouth. 'I have had an immense quantity of what the world calls advantages, there's no denying, and yet they would have been all well exchanged for one simple bit of luck, which I did *not* happen to possess,—that of being born honest! That, I distinctly state and affirm, I was not. Whatever the reason is, I was always an infernal rogue from the time I could write myself man, and long before. Whether the faculty of passionate and sensuous enjoyment was intensified in my idiosyncrasy, while at the same time my reasoning powers were feeble and my conscientiousness absolutely nil—I can't say. The fact, *unde derivata*, remained (and a *fait generateur*, as the French say, it was), when I wanted any thing it always occurred to me with resistless force, that the shortest, most natural, and obvious way to possession was to steal, take, and unlawfully carry away the same. I should have made a famous king; in him annexation is a virtue of the highest order. As a general, could I have overleaped the earlier grades, I should have gone amid shouting thousands to an honoured grave, for I am cool and cheerful in danger, and a demon when my slow blood is fairly up. But as the son of an eminent clergyman, as a mere unit in refined society, my sphere was wretchedly circumscribed. Society became my foe, my fatal foe. Young man, if you hurl yourself upon society, she laughs at the superincumbent hostile weight. If she merely reclines upon you, moral asphyxia results. I have, mind, cast away home, friends, love, honour, position. If I hadn't such an infernally good constitution, death would have long ago squared the account. I am sorry when I think of it. But present troubles once over—"*Libem, libem!*"'

Here he broke forth into the great drinking song, which

he trolled out until the massive timbers of the building echoed.

'And your intention, as far as I was concerned?' asked Ernest, unable to refrain a certain toleration for the 'larcenous epicurean.'

'Well, I couldn't resist trying to appropriate your hundred pounds. You threw it at a fellow's head, as it were. It was partly your own fault.'

'My own fault,' echoed Ernest, in astonishment, 'and why, may I ask?'

'When people are very *very* imprudent, they, as the Methodists phrase it, "put temptation in the way" of other folks, not afflicted, let us say, with severe morals. Now why don't you ride a decent horse when you're travelling, like a gentleman?'

'But surely a man may walk in a new country, if he likes?' pleaded Ernest, half amused at his arguing the question so seriously with a swindler and convicted felon.

'Excuse me,' answered the man of experience, with the readiness of a practical advocate; 'you might drive a tax-cart down Rotten Row, or wear a wideawake and a tourist suit at a flower-show, as far as the power to do so is concerned. But you wouldn't do it, because it would be unfashionable, therefore incorrect. It's unfashionable for a gentleman to walk in this country, therefore nobody does walk on a journey, except labourers, drunkards, persons of bad character like me, or inexperienced young gentlemen like you.'

'Many thanks for your neat explanation and wholesome advice,' said Ernest. 'I don't know whether I shall not act upon it.'

'And may you better rede the advice than ever did the adviser,' quoted the Captain gravely, sonorously, and in final conclusion.

Next morning, after experiencing what fully justified Clarence's exclamation, Mr. Neuchamp and his fellow-traveller were 'haled' before the stipendiary magistrate, who looked at Mr. Neuchamp in a manner so unsympathising that it hurt his feelings.

'John Lulworth Broughton,' said the trooper, in a loud matter-of-fact voice, 'alias Captain Spinks, alias the Knight of Malta, and Ernest Neuchum appears before this court, in custody, your worship, charged with robbery under arms. How do you plead?'

'Not guilty, of course,' replied the Captain, with a shocked expression.

'Not guilty,' said Ernest, in an anxious and horrified tone, 'I wish to explain, I am travelling to the station of——'

'Any statement that you or the other prisoner may wish to make, *after* the evidence is complete, I shall be happy to hear. Until then,' said the police magistrate, with mild but icy intonation, 'I must request you to keep silence, except when cross-examining the witnesses for the Crown.'

Ernest felt outraged and choked. The evidence then being 'gone into,' showed how a certain bank manager at a lonely branch had been awakened at midnight by two men masked and armed; one tall, dark, spoke with a fashionable drawl; the other middle-sized, active, fair-haired, with blue eyes, about twenty-four, spoke rather slowly. Here the police magistrate, the clerk of the bench, the spectators, and the other police constable turned their heads towards Mr. Neuchamp. 'Speaks like a native. Ah! very strong point.'

Witness after witness being examined piled up the evidence that a tall dark man, and a middle-sized fair one had been seen at the scene of the robbery, near the place, the day before, the day after. Every sort of circumstantial evidence was forthcoming, except a link or two which the jury might or might not consider necessary. The magistrate thought a *prima-facie* case for committal had been made out. He was commencing the impressive formula—'Having heard the evidence, do you wish to make any statement,' etc. etc., when a telegram was put into the hand of the senior constable of police.

Reading it rapidly, and handing it to the police magistrate, that official said: 'In consequence of the information just received from my superior officer, by telegram, I beg to apply for the discharge of the younger prisoner.' The police magistrate acceded. Thereupon the door or the gate of the dock was opened and Mr. Neuchamp, permitted egress through the same, much like a rabbit from a hutch, was formally discharged.

'It would appear,' said the stipendiary magistrate, 'from the latest information in the hands of the police, that an instance of mistaken identity has in your case occurred, leading to your—a—apprehension and detention, which, under the circumstances, I regret. Senior-Constable Taylor was fully justified in arresting you as the companion of a notoriously bad and desperate character' (here the Captain smiled serenely, and stroked his moustache)—'in arresting you on suspicion of felony. It appears that the person described in the *Police Gazette*, and whom you unfortunately appear to resemble, has been arrested, and is now in custody at Warren. You are therefore discharged, and as you are a young man of respectable appearance, I trust that it will be a warning to you; a—that is to say, as to the choice of your associates. John Lulworth Broughton, you stand committed to take your trial at the next Quarter Sessions,' etc. etc.

The telegram which had so suddenly and effectually changed the current of Ernest's destiny ran as follows:—'From Sub-Inspector Hawker, Warren, to the officer in charge of police, Boonamarran. The right man, Captain Spinks's mate, arrested here, 4 A.M. Discharge fair prisoner forthwith.'

Ernest left the court certainly a sadder and a presumably wiser man, and sought a private room in the chief inn, having some difficulty in evading the invitations to liquor pressed upon

him by the chief inhabitants, who, having fully agreed that if ever a man looked guilty he did, were anxious now, in reactionary regret, to make him amends for their unfounded and evil thoughts.

Among the persons firmly, perhaps unceremoniously, repelled, was a pale young man with longish hair and an intelligent countenance. This personage sat down and hastily wrote a report of the proceedings, in the course of which he dilated upon the hardship of an untried man suffering the degrading and mental torture to which, if innocent, he is perforce subjected, in the present state of the law. This was at once forwarded to a leading metropolitan journal. A telegram of a sensational nature was also despatched for the evening paper: 'Arrest of a gentleman newly arrived, for robbery under arms. The case broke down. He is now at liberty.'

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN a man has suffered the indignity of actual incarceration, a savour of irrevocable dishonour is apt to cling to the sensation, however innocent the victim may subsequently be proved. Some robes once soiled cannot be washed white. The bloom cannot be replaced upon the blushing fruit. And Ernest sorrowfully reflected that, for all future time, if one of those ruthless vivisectioners, a cross-examining barrister, chose to ask him, as a witness before a crowded court, whether or not he had ever been in gaol charged with highway robbery, he would be compelled to answer 'yes,' with the privilege of explanation after that categorical answer, of course. Much regretful and indignant thought passed through his mind before lunch. The last Neuchamp that had heard a prison door barred behind him was enclosed by a troop of Ironside dragoons in the donjon at Neuchampstead, while they merrily revelled above, and praised the malignant's ale and serving-maids. That was honourable captivity. But to be boxed up in 'the logs' of a bush township, side by side with a confessed robber and swindler! It was hard! The star of the Neuchamps was for a time under an evil influence. However, after a remarkably good lunch and a bottle of Bass (dear to England's subalterns in every land of exile) a more cheerful and philosophical frame of mind succeeded. After all, anybody might be arrested by mistake. No one would ever hear of it, any more than of the detention of Livingstone for a day by King Unilury on the Moombitonja. His friends at Morahmee would *never* discover it, that was as certain as anything could be.

He 'had a great mind,' as the phrase runs, to buy a horse, and so relieve himself, for the future, from all risk of evil communications, and other misfortune, which society seemed, with one accord, to trace directly to his using his own proper legs for purposes of locomotion. But he was a true reformer in this one particular. He was not less obstinate than enthusiastic, and he told himself, as he had commenced his journey on foot, that he would so end it, and complete the distance to Gar-randilla in spite of all the strange people in this very strange

country. He had his own secret doubts as to whether he would need much persuasion to ride or drive whenever he returned to Sydney. But in the meanwhile, and until he was fairly landed at Garrandilla—

Having plentifully refreshed himself, and even provided something edible in case of accidents, he accordingly left town very early next morning, shouldering his knapsack, as usual, and cleared off about ten miles of his journey in the comparative coolness of early morn.

Here he discovered a friendly creek, possessing shade and water, so flinging himself on the sward, he addressed himself to some corned beef with a vigour unabated by previous misfortunes.

Preoccupied with these minute but necessary details, he did not observe that another man had, like him, selected the spot as appropriate to rest, if not to refreshment. The personage whom he so suddenly descried was not pedestrianising, like him, as two serviceable roadsters grazed within a few yards, their fore legs confined by the short chain attached to two leather straps, which had more than once attracted his attention in his travels. In one respect the new traveller differed from any other wayfarer whom Mr. Neuchamp had as yet encountered; for, in spite of the inconveniences to which his late incautious acceptance of companionship had subjected him, he could not refrain from a close examination of the stranger. The unknown was apparently not about to make or to drink a pot of tea. Neither was he smoking, preparing to smoke, nor obviously having just finished smoking.

‘Good-morning,’ said this person, bending a pair of exceedingly keen gray eyes upon Ernest. ‘Travelling early, like myself. Bound for Nubba?’

‘Yes!’ answered Ernest.

‘Going any farther?’

‘As far as Garrandilla,’ he replied.

‘Humph!’ said the new acquaintance. ‘I suppose you were at Boonamarran last night. I left Boree station early, and am going on as soon as my horses have had another half-hour’s picking at this patch of good feed.’

‘Have you breakfasted yet?’ inquired Ernest.

‘Well, I’m not particular about a meal or two,’ cheerfully replied the stranger. ‘I can always find a salad, and with a crust of bread I can manage to get along.’

‘Salad in the bush?’ asked Ernest, with astonishment. ‘I never heard of any before.’

‘There’s always plenty, if you know where to look for it,’ gravely answered the stranger; ‘only men in this country are a deal more fond of making for the nearest public-house than of studying the book of nature, and learning what it teaches them. No man need fast in this country if he knows anything about the herbage and the plants he’s always riding and trampling over.’

'You amaze me!' said Ernest; 'I always thought people ate nothing but meat in this country.'

'When you've been longer in Australia' (Ernest groaned) 'you'll find out, by degrees, that there's a deal of difference in people here, much as, I suppose, there is in other countries. See here,' he continued, taking up and cropping with great relish a succulent-looking bunch of greens, 'here's a real good wholesome cabbage—warrigal cabbage, the shepherds call it. Here's another,' uprooting a long dark-green fibrous-looking wild endive. 'As long as you've these two and marshmallow sprout, you can't starve. Many a pound it's saved me, and you may take my word for it there's more money made in this country by saving than by profits. I suppose you're going to learn colonial experience at Garrandilla.'

'How can he know that?' thought Mr. Neuchamp. 'These people seem to guess correctly about everything concerning me, while I am continually deceived about them.'

'I am just bound on that errand,' he answered, 'though I cannot tell how you arrived at the fact.'

'Well, I didn't suppose you were going as a shepherd, or a stockman, or a knock-about man,' said the stranger carelessly, 'so you must have been going to learn the ways of the country.'

'Do you know Mr. Jedwood?' inquired Ernest.

'Yes; heard of him. That's a good manager; sharp hand; teach you all about stock; make you work while you're there, I expect.'

'I don't mind that; I didn't come up into the bush for anything else. It's not exactly the place one would pick for choice for lounging in, is it?'

'I don't know about that. I'm never contented anywhere else,' said the unknown.

'And I suppose you're looking out for an overseer's situation,' inquired Ernest, exercising his right of cross-examination in turn. He thought by the stranger's economical ideas that he could only be upon his promotion, and not yet arrived at the enviable and lucrative position of 'super,' as he had heard the appointment called.

The stranger smiled faintly in his own grave and reflective fashion, and then, leaning on one elbow and pulling up a tuft of *Anthistiria australis*, which he chewed meditatively, said, 'Well, I have jobs of overseeing now and then.'

'And you expect to save enough money some day,' demanded Ernest, rather elated by the success of his hit, 'I shouldn't wonder, to go into a small station, or leave off work altogether?'

'Some of these days—some of these days,' repeated the stranger, staring absently before him, 'I expect to have what I call enough. But you can't be sure of anything.'

'In the meanwhile you save all you can,' laughed Ernest.

'It's no laughing matter,' said the stranger; 'if you don't save you waste your money, if you waste your money you get into debt, if you get into debt you get so close to ruin that any day he may put his paw down and crush you or lame you for life.'

'That's a solemn view to take of a little debt,' said Ernest, 'but you are right on the whole; and when I come into a station of my own I will be awfully saving.'

'That's right; you can't go wrong if you act up to that. Now, see here, we're about fifteen miles from Nubba.'

Here the stranger raised himself from his recumbent position, exhibiting to Ernest a tall, well-made, sinewy frame, with a keen handsome visage half covered with a bushy brown beard. The eyes were perhaps the most remarkable feature in the face; they were moderate in size, but wonderfully clear and piercing. There was the rare look of absolute unbroken health about the man's whole figure which one sees chiefly in children and very young persons.

'I've a second horse and saddle,' continued the tall stranger; 'I generally take a couple when I'm travelling, they're company for one another, and for me too. So if you are going by Nubba, just you ride this roan horse, and we'll jog on together.'

Ernest considered for a moment. He had paid *de sa personne* for over-hasty acquaintanceship. But he could not for a moment distrust the steady eye and truthful visage of the man who made this friendly offer. He was interested, too, in his talk, and deeming him to be of a rank and condition that he could in some way repay for the obligation, he accepted it frankly.

'Very well,' he said, 'I shall be glad to go with you as far as Nubba. I suppose your horse won't be anything the worse for me and my knapsack.'

'Not he. We'll saddle up. I have a good way to go before sundown.'

'May I ask to whom I am indebted for the accommodation?' inquired Ernest. 'My name is Ernest Neuchamp.'

'Well, Mr.—a—Smith,' said the stranger, with a slight appearance of hesitation. 'It don't much matter about names, except you have to write a cheque or pay a bill. Now then, here's your horse; he's quiet, and an out-and-out ambler.'

After walking for several days, it was a pleasant sensation enough when Ernest, a fair horseman and respectable performer in the hunting-field, found himself on the back of a free easy-paced hackney again. The roan horse paced along at a rate which he was obliged to moderate, to avoid shaking his benefactor, whose horse did not walk very brilliantly, into a jelly.

'This is my morning horse,' said Mr. Smith, slightly out of breath—though he sat his horse with a peculiar instinctive ease, not alone as if he had been accustomed to a horse all his

days, but as if he had been born upon one. 'When you are going a longish journey, you generally have one clever hack and one not quite so good. Well, what you ought to do is to ride the roughest one in the morning, while *you're* fresh, and in the afternoon take the fast or easy one, and you finish the day comfortably.'

'Indeed,' said Ernest, 'that never struck me before; but in England we don't ride far, and never more than one horse at a time.'

'Fine country, England,' said Mr. Smith musingly. 'I was reading in Hallam's *Middle Ages* the other day about these Barons making war upon one another. They must have been a good deal like the squatters here, only they didn't get fined for assaults at the courts of petty sessions, and they had their own lock-ups, and could put a chap in the logs or in their own cellar, and keep him there. I should like to see England.'

'Then you never have seen the old country?' said Ernest. 'How strange it seems to see a grown Englishman like you, for you are one, and very like a Yorkshireman too, who has never seen the chalk cliffs and green meadows. When do you intend to go?'

'Some day, when I can afford it,' answered Mr. Smith.

They were now going at a good journeying pace, not far from five miles an hour, through an open, thinly-timbered, well-grassed country. The grass was long, rather dry looking, and of a grayish green. The road was perfectly smooth, without stone, rut, or inequality of any kind. The day had become insensibly warmer, but the air was wonderfully clear, pure, and dry. Mr. Neuchamp felt sensibly exhilarated by the atmospheric tone.

'What a grand climate,' he thought, as Mr. Smith had subsided into rather an abstracted silence. 'Here we have a combination of sufficient warmth for comfort and high spirits, with that bracing cold of night and early morning necessary to ensure appetite and energy. And there are months upon months of this weather. Once bring a man or woman here, with a sound and unworn constitution, and they might live for ever. No wonder the general tendency of the features of the country-born people is towards the Greek type. The vales and groves of Hellas had no brighter sky than this deep azure, no purer air, no softer whispering breeze.'

After this slight æsthetical reverie Mr. Neuchamp fell a wondering as to the precise social status of his preoccupied but accommodating companion. Rendered wary by previous mistakes, he bestowed great care and caution upon his analysis, and after a most judicial summing-up, decided in his own mind that Mr. Smith was a working overseer, with aspirations superior to his present position, which from his economical habits and self-denying principles, he would at some distant period realise. 'Yes,' said Mr. Neuchamp to himself, 'I shall see him some day

with a nice little station of his own and four or five thousand sheep. He will of course be able to work up from that. But how pleasant it will be to visit him some day and behold his honest pride at having successfully surmounted all his difficulties and triumphantly landed himself upon his own property ! How we shall laugh over to-day's salads and wise saws.' Here Ernest woke up from his Alnaschar musings by which the deserved greatness was to be bestowed upon Mr. Smith. That individual, all unconscious apparently of his imminent and triumphant pastoral profits, called out—

'Do you see that rise with the plain beyond ? Well, Nubba's about a mile the other side. I'm going forty miles farther, so I must have something to eat before we start. Come and have dinner, or whatever you call it, with me.'

They rode into the bush town together. The usual wide street or two ; the straggling shops and cottages ; at each corner a large pretentious store or hotel, a bullock dray, a buggy, a horseman or two, a score of foot-passengers, the incoming mail with four horses and five lamps, made up the visible traffic and population. Forest land had been monotonously prevalent before they reached the town ; a vast, apparently endless plain, the first Mr. Neuchamp had ever seen, stretched beyond it to the horizon. As they rode up to a balconied and two-storied brick hotel he noticed a new ecclesiastical building, the architecture of which contrasted strangely with that of the majority. His educated eye was attracted.

'What a nice church—Early English too—I never expected to see such a building here.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Smith uninterestedly, 'looks neat and strong ; see they've finished it since I passed this way last.'

'It has a decidedly Anglican look, now one examines it. Quite a treat to see such a building in the wilderness. Do you happen to belong to the Church of England, Mr. Smith ?'

'Well, I may say—that is, I believe I'm a Protestant ; I don't know about any denomination in particular. There's good men in all of them. I respect a man who does the work well that he believes in, and is paid for doing. That's my view of the matter.'

'But the glorious tenets of the Reformation to which the English Church has ever held firmly ought to commend its teachings to every open-minded intelligent man,' said Ernest, a little moved.

'I can't say,' said Mr. Smith slowly ; 'I don't know if we should believe in old Harry the Eighth much in the present day. He wouldn't quite do for us out here, though I reckon him a grand Englishman in many ways. Here's the inn, and I'm not above owning I'm ready for a chop.'

The horses were put into the stable ; Mr. Neuchamp conveyed his knapsack into a bedroom, and in a comparatively short time joined Mr. Smith at one of the most tempting meals he had lately encountered.

It was past mid-day, and nothing in the way of disparagement could have been fairly said against the appetite of either gentleman. 'What will you take, beer or wine?' asked Mr. Smith, ringing the bell as they sat down.

Ernest thought pale ale not inappropriate, though he wondered at his theoretically economical friend being so luxurious in practice. 'Just the way with all these bushmen,' he thought. 'This poor fellow will have to go without something for this; but I won't hurt his feelings by refusing to join him.'

'Bring in some bottled beer, then,' said Mr. Smith. The waiter flew to execute his command.

'Here,' thought Ernest, 'is another example of the superior sympathy of colonial manners. Here is the poor overseer, working his way up in the world, and he is treated with as much deference as if he were a wealthy man. There is nothing like a colony for the repression of vulgar servility to mere wealth.'

Here the waiter, bearing beer, reappeared.

'I don't take anything but tea myself,' said Mr. Smith, 'but to those who are used to it cool bitter beer goes well in any kind of weather. Anything is better than the confounded hard stuff.'

Mr. Neuchamp did not comprehend whether the latter deleterious compound was a solid or a liquid, but he was annoyed at drinking at the expense of a man unable to bear the cost, and who did not keep him company in the consumption of the liquor.

'I wouldn't have had anything but tea if I had known that was your tippie too,' he said. 'I'm not averse to Good Templarism in the desert, and can live on coffee as well as a Bedouin Arab. You must come to my place some day when I have one, and we'll drink tea till all's blue.'

'Very well,' said Smith. 'I'm passing Garrandilla—shall I say you're coming along by degrees, and will be there some day?'

'Just so,' said Ernest; 'there's no necessity for hurry. Tell Mr. Jedwood that, picking up colonial experience as I go along, I shall be there within a month.'

'Well, good-bye,' said Mr. Smith; 'I daresay we shall see each other again. Don't you go and waste your money, mind that, and you'll be a big squatter some day.'

'I don't know about that,' said Ernest; 'I don't so much want to make money, you know, as to do some good in the land.'

'That's quite right,' said Mr. Smith, grasping his hand with the hearty grip of the man of whole heart and strong will, 'but you try and make some money first. People won't believe in your opinions unless you show them that you can make money to begin with; after that you can say anything, and teach and preach as much as you like; and if you want to hold

your own in any line you fancy, don't you go and waste your money, as I said before. Good-bye.'

The horses had been brought round; Mr. Smith, rather inconsistently, gave the highly respectful groom half a crown after this economical homily, and mounting the roan horse touched the other with the bridle rein, and ambled off at the rate of six miles an hour.

'Good-hearted fellow, Smith,' said Mr. Neuchamp expressively to the landlord, who with a select part of the townspeople had paid Mr. Smith the compliment of assembling to see him off; 'hope he'll get on in the world; I feel sure he deserves it.'

'Get on in the world, sir!' echoed the landlord, in tones of wild amaze; 'who do you mean, sir?'

'Why, Mr. Smith, of course, the gentleman who has just ridden away,' said Ernest, rather tartly. 'He is a most economical but estimable and intelligent person, and I feel convinced that he will get on, and have a station of his own before many years.'

'Mr. Smith! a station of his own!' said the landlord in faint tones, as of one preparing to swoon. 'Do you know who you're a-talkin' of, sir? why that's Habstinens Levison, Hesquire, the richest man in Australia. Station of his own! Good lor—('scuse me, sir, you ain't long from 'ome, sir?); why he's got *thirty stations*, sir, with more than a hundred thousand head of cattle, and half a million of sheep! So I've heard tell, leastwise.'

Mr. Neuchamp thought it would not be inappropriate if *he* fainted after this astounding revelation. He had heard Mr. Frankston tell a story or two of the wealthy and eccentric Abstinens Levison, and here he had met him in the flesh, and had been rather proud of his penetration in summing him up as an overseer on his promotion, who had saved a few hundred pounds and would be a squatter before he died.

'Mr. Levison was here one day, sir,' continued the landlord, 'callin' hisself Smith, or Jones, or something; he don't want to be worried by charity-agents and such; when the clergyman spotted him and asks him for something towards the Church of Hengland there—'andsome building, ain't it, sir?—what I call respectable and substantial—he writes him out a cheque very quiet and crumples it up and gives it 'im; when he looks at it outside, blest if it warn't for five hundred pounds!'

'I suppose the reverend gentleman was contented with that,' said Ernest, thinking of the stranger's non-committal remarks as they passed the same building.

'Not he—parsons ain't never contented, 'specially those as has a turn for begging for a good object—they say. Next time he passes through, our reverend thought he'd touch him a bit more. "Mr. Levison," says he, "this here beauteous structure as you've so magnificently contributed to, ain't got no lightning-conductor, and it's a pity such a pooty building should be hin-

jured by the hangry helements," says he. "Look here," says Levison, "I've helped you to build the church, and given my share ; if God Almighty chooses to knock it down again, He can do so, it's no business of mine any further," he says.

Ernest thought this very like one of Levison's reflective, unprejudiced speeches, and could imagine his saying it without any feeling of irreverence. Five hundred pounds without a word, unobtrusively, hardly caring to use his own well-known name for fear of the drawbacks and disabilities of proverbial wealth. 'A most extraordinary man truly,' thought Ernest—'simple, strong, manifestly of the true hunter type ; a man given to lone journeyings through the wilderness ; fond of preserving his incognito, and of the small, wellnigh incredible economies which speak to him of his earlier life.' Now, Mr. Neuchamp saw the secret of the ultra-respectful bearing of the servants and landlord of the inn to the owner of a couple of millions of acres, leasehold, and of more sheep than Esterhazy, and more cattle than a score of Mexican rancheros. 'He certainly is a man of unpretentious demeanour,' thought Ernest. 'Whoever would have guessed that he was so tremendous a proprietor ! "Don't you go for to waste your money." Was that the way he had made the nucleus of this colossal fortune ? and did the occasional saving of a meal, and the utilising of the edible plants of the plain and forest dell, go to swell the rills which joined their streams of profit into the great river of his prosperity ?' Ernest Neuchamp all but resolved to give up speculating upon the character and professions of these provokingly unintelligible colonists, to believe what he saw—even that, with deduction and reason—and to 'learn and labour truly to get his own living,' without constant reference to the motives and practice of others engaged in the same necessary pursuit. All this he for the time fully believed that he would in the future carry out. But his nature, with its passionate proclivities for intellectual research, continued to whisper of regions of territory and character yet unexplored, and to beckon the ardent champion of light and truth forward even yet, though clouds of distrust and disappointment clustered round his path.

Mr. Neuchamp decided to stay where he was that evening, and to take a strictly impartial and prosaic survey of the town and environs.

CHAPTER IX

THE town of Nubba was a fair specimen of Australian settlement that gradually grows and bourgeons on a favourable spot, where highroads pass and converge. Here there had been, primarily, a ford of the occasionally flooded river. The teams, bound from or for the far interior, camped upon the broad flat made by the semicircular sweep of the river, and so established it as a stage and a resting-place. Then a reflective mail-driver built a public-house, doubtful but inevitable precursor in all colonial communities of civilisation, even of the organised teaching of Christianity. Then a blacksmith's shop, a butcher's, a baker's, followed; in due course a second inn, a pound, appeared; finally a bridge was built; and Nubba represented an established fact, named, inhabited, and fairly started in the competitive race with other Anglo-Saxon cities, walled and unwallcd.

Still further progress. Anon it boasted a full-blown municipality, with a mayor, aldermen, a town clerk, ratepayers, all the ordinary British machinery for self-government. The streets were aligned, metalled, and culverted; the approaches to the town cleared and levelled; several stores, two flour mills, three banks, four churches, ten hotels, and scores of intermediate edifices, including a massive gaol, all built of stone, arose. A resident police magistrate reigned, having jurisdiction over three hundred square miles, assisted by neighbouring country justices. Strict, not stern, they were a terror to evildoers, and no particular laxity of legal obligation was permitted the lieges on account of their distance from the metropolis. Let but so much as a Chinaman or a blackfellow be slain by chance, medley, or otherwise, or a calf stolen, at the extreme limit of this far-stretching territory, and all actors and participants were tried, committed, or discharged, as the case might be. The costly and august machinery of the law was put in motion with the same impassive exactitude as if the offenders resided in Middlesex or Devonshire.

'There,' said Mr. Neuchamp, possessed of these facts, and indeed having experienced in his own person the unrelaxing

grip of the law, 'is the precise point of difference between the state of society in English and other communities. In other lands, notably in America, the vast distances and what are superficially called the rude circumstances of early settlement, are permitted to condone infringements upon the social rights. When these become too flagrant Judge Lynch interferes, and rude justice, or injustice, is done. In the meantime, right has often suffered irrevocably at the hands of might. But an Englishman, in what far land soever under the flag of his country, suffers under no such policy of expediency. He carries his law with him. He relies for protection of life and property upon the Queen's Government, to which he has for his life long appealed in his hour of need, and never in vain; and he generally receives justice, whether he be in the heart of a continent or in a populous and accessible seaport.'

Southward of the future city, Mr. Neuchamp observed farms, orchards, enclosed pasture-lands—all the signs of a thriving agricultural district,—great stacks of grain and hay, fields of maize, pigs, and poultry in profusion; while the steam flour mills, whose mechanical whir and throb ceased not, night or day, showed that the supply of the staff of life was large and continuous. Every farm had been but recently occupied, and yet on all sides fencing, building, girdling trees, the manifold acts of agriculture combined with pasture, were proceeding energetically. The land was richer, the timber more dense, and possibly the climate more temperate and humid than the northerly division following the downward course of the river exhibited.

In this direction the metalled road after a couple of miles abruptly terminated, the way thenceforth continuing by a broad Indian-like trail, which led towards the fervid north. Few trees were seen after this immediate vicinity of the town was quitted, and the immense plain lost itself in a soft and silvery haze which enveloped the far distance and spread to the horizon.

'Well,' soliloquised Ernest, 'this is perhaps not exactly the place a half-pay officer would come to, or a reduced merchant's family, anxious to discover cheap living, good society, efficient teaching, musical tuition, and an agreeable climate, in perfect combination. But even they might do worse. The great secret of steady, inevitable prosperity here is the wonderful cheapness of land combined with its abundance.

'What a rush would there be in Buckinghamshire, if "persons about to marry," or others, could "take up," that is merely mark out and occupy, as much land as they pleased up to a square mile in extent, previously paying down "five shillings the acre"—save the mark!

'And the land is as good here, if you except the choicest meadow farms. The climate is benign and healthful—say it is hot during the summer, fewer clothes are wanted; the water is

pure and plentiful ; firewood costs nothing. The forest is clear of underwood, and parklike ; you do not need to hew yourself an opening out of an impenetrable wood, as in Canada. The climate and natural advantages of the land constitute an income in themselves. When I think of the severely tasked lives, the scanty, often dismal, outlook of our labouring classes, I am filled with wonder that they do not emigrate in a body. "To the northward all is" plain.'

Here therefore Mr. Neuchamp observed but faint signs of civilisation. The pastoral age had returned. Great droves of cattle, vast flocks of sheep, alone travelled this endless trail. The mail, of course, dusty and of weather-beaten aspect, occasionally rattled in with sun-burned and desert-worn passengers from the inner deserts. But few stock were visible on the plain, 'grassy and wild and bare' within sight of the town. Still, by all classes, Ernest heard this apparently wild and trackless region spoken of as a rich pastoral district, equal in profitable trade to the agricultural division, and indeed perhaps superior in the average of returns for investment.

'I am a great believer in the plough myself,' he thought, 'but I suppose these people know something about their own affairs.'

Mr. Neuchamp was beginning to derive practical benefit from his experiences. This was a great concession for him.

Next morning, having ascertained his line of route, and that Garrandilla was about two hundred and fifty miles distant, Ernest shouldered his knapsack and prepared to finish his little walk.

'It's a lucky thing that there are no Red Indians or wild beasts on this particular war-path,' thought he, as he left the town behind him and was conscious of becoming a speck upon the vast and lonely plain. 'I feel horribly unprotected. Even an old shepherd might rob me, if he had a rusty gun. I might as well have carried my revolver, but the weight was a consideration. How grand this sandy turf is to walk upon. I feel as if I could walk all day. Not a hill in sight either, or, apparently, a stone. I can imagine some people thinking the scene monotonous.'

Such a thought would have occurred to many minds ; but there was no likelihood of such a feeling possessing Ernest Neuchamp. To him the strange salsolaceous plants, so succulent and nutritive, were of constant interest and admiration. The new flowers of the waste were freshly springing marvels. The salt lake, strewn with snowy crystals and with a floor like an untrodden ice-field, was a magical transformation. The crimson flags of the mesembryanthemum cast on the sand, the gorgeous desert flower, the strutting bustard, the tiny scampering kangaroo, were all dramatic novelties. As he strode on, mile after mile, at a telling elastic pace, he thought that never in his whole life had he traversed a land so interesting and delightful.

All the day across the unending plains, sometimes intersected by small watercourses. Towards nightfall, however, this very unrelieved landscape became questionable. Ernest began to speculate upon the chance of finding a night's lodging. Not that there was any great hardship in sleeping out in the mild autumnal season, but the not having even a tree to sleep under was a condition of things altogether unaccustomed, unnatural, and weird in his eyes.

Just as the sun was sinking behind the far, clear, delicately drawn sky-line, a deep fissure was visible in the plain, at the bottom of which lay *planté la*, a rough but not uninviting hostelry. There he succeeded in bestowing himself for the night. He was perhaps more fatigued than at any previous time. He had been excited by the prairie-like nature of the landscape, and had covered more ground than on any day since he started.

The food was coarse and not well cooked, but hunger and partial fatigue are unrivalled condiments. Bread, meat, and the wherewithal to quench thirst are amply sufficient for the real toiler, not overborne, like the luxurious children of civilisation, by multifarious half-digested meals. Mr. Neuchamp, therefore, on the following morning, having slept magnificently and eaten a truly respectable breakfast, surveyed the endless plain from the back of the ravine with undiminished courage.

He amused himself by considering what sort of mental existence the family who kept this wayside caravanserai could possibly lead. 'They must feel a good deal like Tartars,' decided he. 'Here they are deposited, as if dropped from the sky upon this featureless waste. They have no garden, not even a cabbage or a climbing rose; no cows, no sheep; of course they have half a dozen horses. I saw no books. They do not take a newspaper. The landlady and her two daughters occupy themselves in doing the housework, certainly, in a very perfunctory manner. The man of the house moves in and out of the bar, smokes continually, and sleeps on the bench in the afternoons. When travellers come occupation, profit, society, and information are provided for the whole household till the next invasion. What are their hopes—what their social aims? Some day to sell out and live in Nubba, the landlord informed me. How little of life suffices for the millions who possess it in this curiously fashioned world of ours!'

Mr. Neuchamp took his departure from this uninteresting lodge in the wilderness, and commenced another day's travel, not altogether dissatisfied with the idea that the end of another week would bring his pilgrimage to a close.

Mid-day found him still tramping onward over ground so accurately resembling that he crossed during his previous day's journey, that if he had been carried back he could not have detected the difference. A feeling of great loneliness came over him, and despite the doubtful success of his chance acquaintance-

ship he began to wish for another travelling companion, of whatever character or condition in life. He had not shaped this desire definitely for many minutes, before, as if the attendant friend was watchful, a man debouched from a shallow watercourse, and walked towards him.

The new-comer carried, like himself, a species of pack strapped to his shoulders, but it was rolled up after the country fashion, in a form commonly known as a 'swag,' containing apparently a pair of blankets and a few articles of necessity.

Ernest saw in the traveller a good-looking, powerful young man, patently of the ordinary type of bush natives of the lower rank—a stockman, station hand, horsebreaker, or what not. Then his expression of countenance was determined, almost stern. When Ernest accosted him, and asked him if he were travelling 'down the river,' like himself, his features relaxed and his soft low voice, a very general characteristic of Australian youth, sounded respectful and friendly in answer.

He was therefore considerably astonished when the young man promptly produced a revolver, and presenting it full at Mr. Neuchamp's person, called upon him in an altered voice, rounded off with a ruffianly oath, to give up his watch and money.

The watch was easily seen, as part of the chain was visible, but much marvelled Ernest Neuchamp that the robber, or any other man, should know that he had money with him. It was indeed a chance shot. The young marauder, having judged him to be a gentleman not long in the country, who was fool enough to travel on foot when he had plenty of money to buy a good hack, also decided that he must have a five-pound note or two wherewith to negotiate in time of need.

Ernest Neuchamp was brave. The action of his heart was unaltered. His pulse quickened not as he stood before an armed and lawless man. He did not, of course, particularly care to lose a valuable family gold watch, or ten pounds sterling. But far more deeply than by personal loss or danger was he impressed by the melancholy fact that here was a fine intelligent young fellow, physically speaking, one of the grandest specimens of Caucasian type anywhere procurable, dooming himself, merely by this silly act, with, perhaps, another, to long years of lonely, degrading, maddening prison life. He did not look like a hardened criminal. It may be that a single act of sullen despair, derived from others' guilt, had driven him to this course, which, once entered upon, held no retreat.

There were few cooler men than Ernest. He became so entirely possessed with a new idea, that circumjacent circumstances, however material to him personally, rarely affected him.

'My good fellow,' he commenced, sitting down deliberately, 'of course you can have my watch and a tenner, that I happen to have about me. I don't say you are welcome to them, either.

But what principally strikes me is, that you are an awful fool to exchange your liberty, your youth, your good name, your very life, for trifles like these. Did this ever occur to you?' asked Ernest with much gravity, handing out the watch and one five-pound note, and feeling anxiously for the other, as if he hoped he hadn't lost it. 'Why, hang it all, man, you put me in mind of a savage, who sells himself for a few glass beads, a tomahawk, and a Brummagem gun. Surely you *can't* have considered this view of the subject, so deeply important to you?'

'It's devilish important to you too,' said the bushranger grimly, though he looked uneasy. 'You're a rum cove to go talking and preaching to a chap with a revolver at your head.'

'I don't suppose that you would shoot a man in cold blood for giving you good advice! A watch and a few pounds are no great loss to me, but the taking of them means death and destruction to *you*—a living death, worse a hundredfold than if you were lying there with a bullet through your heart. That's what I really feel at this moment. You are taking *your own life with your own hand*! Think, do think, like a good fellow, before it is too late!'

'That you may go straight back to the Nubba police station as soon as I slope,' said the robber. 'I could stop that, you know.'

'I never intended it—not that your threat prevents me. But once entered on the trade of bushranger, I am not the only man you will rob. Others, of course, will inform, and in a week your description—age, height, hair, scar on the forehead and all—will be at every police station in the four colonies. You may have a month's run, or two, and then you are—'

'Shot like a dog, or walled up for life, and driven about like brutes that are called men.'

'Perfectly right. I am glad you agree with my view,' said Ernest eagerly; 'then *why* don't you retreat while you have time, and the chance is open? Look at this blue sky; think of a good horse between your legs on this broad plain, of a day's shooting, of waking full of life and vigour and going cheerfully to work on your own farm. Such a deuced good-looking, up-standing fellow as you are—what devil put it into your head to give every enemy you have in the world such a chance to laugh at you?'

'Perhaps the devil did. Anyhow, I have been hunted about and falsely accused by the police, about horses and cattle that I never saw a head of; so I turned out.'

'Just to put them thoroughly in the right,' said Ernest. 'They will thank you for that, and say they always knew it from the first. For God's sake, if you have a grain of sense in your composition, if you have the least wish to live a man's life and stand erect like a man before your fellows, for the sake of the mother that bore you' (here the robber ground his teeth),

'give up this stupid, stale trick of highway robbery, and you will cheat Old Nick yet.'

'Well, I begin to think I *was* an infernal fool to turn out. It seems a trifle now to be vexed at, but what can I do? I've gone too far to turn back.'

'Have you attempted to stop any one but me?' asked Ernest.

'No! I was waiting for the coach, which ought to have been here by this time, when I met you. Ha! there it comes.'

'Take your resolution now,' said Ernest solemnly, springing to his feet and standing before him. 'Your fate for life or death is in your own hand: the life of a hunted, half-starved wolf, with perhaps a dog's death, on one side; life, health, youth, liberty, perhaps a happy home, on the other. Are you mad, that you hesitate? or does God suffer the enemy to deceive and destroy in the dark hour a lost soul?'

As Ernest spoke, he fixed his clear blue eyes upon the face of the robber, now working as if torn by strong emotion.

Suddenly the latter strode a pace forward, and casting the revolver away as far as he could throw it in the dull green grass, said, 'Damn the — squirt! I wish I had never seen it. Here's your two fives, sir, and my best thanks, for I ain't much of a talker, but I feel it. Good-bye.'

'Stop!' cried Ernest, 'where are you going, and what do you intend to do, and have you any money?'

'I don't know. I haven't a copper; it was being chaffed about that by a girl I was fond of that made me think of this. I suppose I'll drop across work before long. God knows! it's never hard to get in the bush.'

'The deeper shame on him who takes to evil courses in such a country,' said Ernest; 'but I don't intend to preach to you. You have acted like a man, and I will stand to you as far as I can. I can perhaps get you work on a station I am bound for. So come along with me, and we shall be fellow-travellers after all.'

The coach passed just then, filled with passengers, who looked with idle curiosity at the wayfarers.

'Those chaps would have had a different look in their eyes about this time, only for you,' said the ex-brigand grimly. 'A little thing makes all the difference. I might have shed blood or got hit before this. However, all that's past and gone, I hope. I can work, as you'll see, and I'll keep square for the future if I haven't a shirt to my back.'

The armistice completed, the two curiously-met comrades recommenced their march. When Mr. Neuchamp, once more in possession of his timekeeper and cash, had sufficient leisure to return to his usual observing habit, he could not but be struck with the fine form and splendid proportions of Mr. 'First robber,' who went singing and whistling along the road with an elastic step, as if care and he had parted company for ever and a day.

He was a brown-haired, bright-eyed, good-natured-looking fellow of five or six and twenty. His natural expression seemed to be that of mischievous, unrestrained fun, though the lower part of his face in moments of gravity showed firmness and even obstinacy of purpose. He stood nearly six feet in height, with the build of an athletic man of five feet eight. His broad shoulders, deep chest, and muscular arms showed to considerable advantage in contrast with his light, pliant, and unusually active lower limbs.

'A dangerous outlaw,' thought Mr. Neuchamp, 'roused by resistance, whetted with the taste of blood, and desperate from a foreknowledge of heavy punishment, he would have ended his life on the scaffold, with perhaps on his head the blood of better men; and it looks as if I, Ernest Neuchamp, have this day been the instrument of turning this man's destiny, at the point of amendment or ruin. "So mote it be."'

The day was spent, and Mr. Neuchamp had begun to entertain transient thoughts of moderate roadside comforts and the like, when his companion stopped and pointed to a cloud of dust almost at right angles to the road.

'Travelling sheep,' he said, 'and coming this way—a big lot, too.'

'Are they?' inquired Mr. Neuchamp. 'What are they doing out there?'

'Travelling for grass, most likely; or for sale. Perhaps short of feed or water, or both; they're "out on the wallaby" until the rain comes.'

'What is the meaning of "out on the wallaby"?' asked Ernest.

'Well, it's bush slang, sir, for men just as you or I might be now, looking for work or something to eat; if we can't get work, living on the country, till things turn round a little.'

'Oh! that's it—well, don't be afraid, things are sure to turn round a little, if we wait long enough. Who's this, coming galloping at such a rate?'

'Looks like the overseer. He's coming to see if there's any water in the creek. They'll camp here most likely. He's in a hurry.'

The individual thus criticised was a stout man, past middle age, who bore himself with an air of great responsibility and anxiety.

'Hallo!' he said, pointing to the creek, 'is there any water there?'

'Lots,' said the pene-felonious traveller—'good place to camp.'

'How do you know?' cautiously inquired the overseer.

'Because I've been this road often, and know every water-hole and camping-place and feeding-ground from this to Went worth.'

'All right, you're the very man I want; that is, I want two

men for one of the flocks. I've just sacked a couple of idle rascals, and run short—will you and your mate come?’

‘He’s not used to droving work,’ pleaded the experienced one, doubtful of Ernest’s wish for occupation of that sort.

‘Oh, never mind, any fool can drive travelling sheep; you’re sharp enough, at any rate. I’ll give you five-and-twenty shillings a week each. You can join when they come into camp. What do you say?’

‘Very well,’ said Ernest, ‘I will engage for a month—not longer, as I have to go to a station called Garrandilla then.’

‘All right,’ said the overseer, ‘we pass it; it will be something to get hands so far;’ and away the man of many troubles galloped.

‘What do you say now? Here we are provided with easy, honest, and well-paid employment for as long as we please, with high wages, unlimited food, and sleeping accommodation. I shall rather take them in at Garrandilla.’

The army of sheep—about thirty thousand, in fifteen flocks, at length reached the valley before dark, and the overseer, pointing to a flock of two thousand more or less, said, ‘There’s your mob—if either of you want to go, you must give me a week’s notice. If I sack either of you, I shall pay him one week in advance.’

As the sheep approached, feeding in a leisurely manner, and gradually converging towards the flat, the two men walked towards the leading flock.

‘Hallo!’ said the ex-brigand to one of the shepherds, ‘are you the two chaps that the cove has sacked, because we are to take your flock?’

‘All right—you’re welcome, mates, to my share,’ said an elderly colonist; ‘that super’s a growlin’, ignorant beggar as runs a feller from daylight to dark for nothing at all. If all the other men was of my mind we’d leave him to drive his —— sheep himself.’

‘That’s the talk!’ said the highwayman cautiously, ‘but we’re hard up, and that makes the difference; we go on till we pick up something better. What will you take for that dog of yours? I suppose he can hunt ’em along.’

‘Best dog from here to Bourke. I’ll take two pounds for him.’

‘No you won’t. I’ll chance a note for him, and that’s about our last shilling, isn’t it?’ added he, looking at Ernest.

‘Well, the dog’s worth a couple of notes, young feller,’ said the shepherd reflectively, ‘but as you’re a-goin’ to take the sheep, and down on your luck, why you can have him.’

Ernest nodded assent as purse-bearer.

‘Will you give us chain and collar in the camp to-night? I’ll pay you there,’ said the negotiator. ‘I suppose you won’t clear out till to-morrow?’

‘No fear—it’s a good way to Nubba, and Bill and I are going

back to the timber country ; we've had enough of these blasted plains, ha'n't we, Bill ? Enough to burn a blessed man's blessed eyes out. Five-and-twenty bob a week don't pay a cove for that. I mean to stick to the green grass country for a spell now.'

At nightfall the fifteen flocks of sheep were all brought in, and 'boxed,' or mixed together, to Ernest's astonishment. 'How in the world do they ever get them into the same flocks again ?' he asked.

'They don't try,' it was explained. 'They just cut them up into fifteen equal lots in the morning, as near as they can, a hundred or two more or less makes no great difference, and away they go along the road stealing as much grass as the squatters are soft enough to let them.'

'And will they stay quietly here all night ?'

'Safe as houses. Sheep ain't like cattle ; they don't like skirmishing about in the dark. So after tea a man can light his pipe, roll his blanket round him, and make believe to watch till daylight. It's a very off chance if e'er a sheep stirs any more than himself.'

'It doesn't seem a hard life,' said Ernest, as they sat on a log and ate chops fried in a pan, using a large flat piece of damper partly as plate, partly as *entrée*, while the pint of quart-pot tea tasted better and was more refreshing than the highest priced Souchong in the daintiest china.

'Well, it's a long way from hard work, but six months of it at a time, as I've had now and then, makes you feel you've had enough for a while ; besides, it's Sunday and workday ; not an hour's change week in, week out.'

'I daresay that makes a difference,' admitted Ernest, 'but I wonder what a Buckinghamshire field labourer would think if he were suddenly offered twenty-five shillings a week, with all the bread and mutton he could eat, and a small bag of tea.'

'And half rations for the dawg,' put in the Australian, throwing their new purchase about half a pound of mutton.

'By the way,' said Ernest, 'what is his name ? and yours too, for I don't know yet ? I suppose he will be very useful. I'm glad you bought him.'

'My name's Jack Windsor ; his name's Watch ; he's that useful that three men with two pairs of legs each couldn't do the work that he'll do for us with these crawling sheep. He's a cheap pound's worth, and that you'll find before we go far.'

When the evening meal was finished Mr. Neuchamp and his henchman went over to one of four fires which had been lighted at opposite sides of the woolly multitude. Jack Windsor lighted his pipe and lay down upon his blanket, where he smoked luxuriously and dozed by turns. Ernest reclined in the same fashion, and after a short struggle with his very natural drowsiness fell fast asleep.

At daylight next morning Mr. Neuchamp awoke without it

being necessary for any one to call him. The bosom of great mother Hertha was harder than any resting-place which he had hitherto tried. But youth and an adventurous disposition being on his side, he found when dressed that the mental thermometer registered an altitude fully above the average. The sheep were still lying down and appeared by no means to be anxious to crop the dewy grass, or whatever somewhat wiry and infrequent herbage did duty for that traditional description.

'Yonder's the cook's fire,' explained Mr. Windsor, pointing to a rising smoke; 'we'd better get our breakfast to begin with.'

Round a blazing fire, the warmth of which, in the sharp autumn morning, was decidedly pleasant, were grouped thirty or forty men engaged in talking, warming themselves, and in a leisurely way partaking of a substantial breakfast. From a pyramid of chops, replenished from an immense frying-pan, with a handle like a marlin-spike, each man abstracted whatever he chose. Wedges of damper (or bread baked in hot ashes) were cut from time to time from great circular flat loaves of that palatable and wholesome but somewhat compressed looking bread, while gallons of hot tea were procurable from buckets full of the universal bush beverage.

The overseer and some of the horse drivers were absent, as the hacks and cart-horses had wandered during the night rather farther than usual. Ernest and his companion applied themselves to the serious business of the hour, the former conscious that he was being subjected to a searching inspection from his fellow-employees. His rough tweed suit was sufficiently different from the blue serge shirts and peajackets of the others to mark his different social position, had not his hands, fresh complexion, and general appearance denoted him to be a 'new arrival,' and more or less a swell. Swells out of luck are unfortunately by no means rare as ordinary bush hands in Australia, and such a phenomenon would not ordinarily have excited curiosity or hostile criticism. Still a little rough jesting is not to be avoided sometimes when an obviously raw comrade joins a bush brigade.

It was natural enough then that a tall, dissipated-looking fellow with a whiskerless face and long hair, a leader and wit of the community, should step forward and address Mr. Neuchamp.

'Well, Johnny, and what do you think of travelling with store sheep in this blessed country? You didn't do none o' that in the blessed old country as you've just come from, did ye now?'

'My name is not Johnny,' replied Ernest, arresting mastication and looking calmly at his interlocutor. 'As for driving sheep, it would be pleasant enough if people didn't ask impudent questions.'

There was a shout of laughter from the crowd at this retort,

which was held to have rather turned the tables upon the provincial humorist.

'Come, come, Johnny! don't cut up rusty,' he continued; 'you may as well tell us what sort of work you bolted from to turn knock-about-man; counter-jumping, or something in the figs line, by the look of your 'ands, eh?'

Mr. Neuchamp had a reasonably good temper, but he had not as yet been accustomed to aught but extreme civility from the lower classes. He had not slipped on too recently the skin of a knock-about-man to realise how it felt to be chaffed as an equal by a fellow-servant.

'You're an insolent scoundrel,' said he, dashing down the remainder of his breakfast, 'whom I will soon teach to mind his own business. Put up your hands.'

Ernest, though not above the middle size, was strongly knit, and had received the ordinary fisticulture which enables the average English gentleman to hold his own so creditably against all comers. He was a hard hitter when roused, and doubtless would have come out of the encounter with honour. But his antagonist was three inches taller, longer in the reach, a couple of stones heavier, and being in top wind and condition after six months' road-work, and withal a sort of second-rate bruiser, might have inconvenienced and would certainly have marked Mr. Neuchamp in any case.

Just as his late tormentor had lounged forward into a careless guard and an insolent oath, Ernest felt himself quickly but firmly pushed aside, while Jack Windsor stood like a lion in the path.

'Take it out of me, ye cursed infernal bully; what the devil is it to you if a gentleman likes to have his colonial experience this way? You're a deal too fond of showin' off and taking the change out of men that isn't your match. Now you've dropped in for it lucky. Mind yourself.'

The crowd closed in with great though unspoken delight at this prospect of a real good fight. They intended to interfere directly the new chum, as they called him, and 'Bouncing Bob' had had the first flutter. But here was a 'dark horse,' evidently good for a close heat. What a glorious relief from the monotony of their daily dodging along the road with stubborn and impoverished sheep.

'Bouncing Bob,' though a smart fellow enough with his hands, liked a small allowance of weight, science, or pluck; he was better at a winning than an uphill fight. He now distinctly felt that the chances in the contest would be likely to be the other way.

Mr. John Windsor did not leave him long in doubt. Quick as lightning his left was in, and though by a rapid counter Bob managed to score a smack that counted for first blood, it was apparent that he was no match for the stranger, who was at once stronger, more active, and more scientific.

A couple of inches shorter, Jack Windsor was the heavier man. Bob's activity gave him the chance of escape from two falls, one of which nearly finished the fray; but he failed to come so well away from a right-handed feint, which occasioned his catching finally a terrific left-hander, sending him down so decisively that he saw no particular use in coming to time.

'I suppose I may as well give you best,' he said, rising with some difficulty and showing an apparently fatally ensanguined countenance; 'I didn't begin except for a bit of chaff. It's making a darned fuss about a — new chum.'

With this Parthian shaft he departed, to be in readiness for the flock when cut off; while Jack Windsor amused himself whistling softly. Before he replaced his shirt he said, 'Now, look here, boys; we don't want to interfere with anybody, but this gentleman here is my master for the time, and any one who wants to take the change out of him will have to come to me first.'

'All right,' said one of the crowd; 'it won't do Bouncing Bob any harm to get a floorer or two, he's only being paid for many a dab he's given himself.'

Just at this moment a great clatter of bells was heard, and the overseer rode in at a gallop on a barebacked steed, with all the camp horses before him.

'Now, look alive, men, and get your sheep out. Don't be sticking in this camp all day. Hallo! What's the row about?'

'Nothing much, sir,' returned Windsor respectfully; 'me and that long chap they call Bob had a bit of an argument; he began it, and he's got a black eye or two. I don't suppose there'll be any more of it.'

'Well, take care there is not, or I shall have to sack the pair of you. Quite enough to do without fighting now. Get away with your sheep, like good fellows. The carts can follow.'

A section of about the required number having been made at the time by a line of men getting behind the leading sheep and driving them forcibly forward, at the same time preventing them (if possible) from running back to the still larger lot, Jack signed to Mr. Neuchamp, and putting the dog Watch at their heels, who aided them vociferously, they found themselves in possession of eighteen or nineteen hundred sheep, which they drove for some distance at right angles to the road.

'Now what we've got to do, sir,' said Jack, 'is to keep quietly behind these sheep all day. We must not go more than half a mile away from the road, or we'll be 'pounded. We can't follow the flock in front very close or let the one behind get too near us, or we shall get boxed.'

'What do you mean by boxed?' demanded Ernest.

'Well, mixed up. You see, sir, sheep's very fond of keeping all together. It's their nature. If they get any way close they begin to run, the front to the back and the back to the front,

and all the men and dogs in the world wouldn't keep 'em apart.'

'And what harm would that be?'

'Well, we should have four thousand sheep to manage instead of two, and they wouldn't drive so well or feed so well, and as these sheep are as poor as crows already, that wouldn't suit.'

'I see,' replied Ernest. 'I think I understand the principle of the thing.'

'All right, sir,' assented Jack. 'Now, we've got the day before us, and nothing to think about till dinner-time but the sheep. Did you bring any grub with you?'

'Not I—don't we stop?'

'Not a stop till sundown. You see, sir, the days are short now, and it's more fair and straightforward like to the sheep to let 'em go nibbling and feeding all day, just keeping their right distance from one another, till camping time, then they draw in together, and they can camp till further orders.'

To keep slowly walking up and down, back and forward, behind a flock of sheep, from seven or eight A.M. till five P.M., the rate of speed and progress being considerably under a mile an hour, did not seem likely to turn out a cheerful occupation for three weeks. Mr. Neuchamp's heart sank under the contemplation for a moment. But after all he considered that he was doing a good deed in the conversion of a weak brother (morally) from a criminal career to honesty and a good reputation. This was a result which would have overpaid him for considerably more inconvenience than he was liable to suffer now. Besides, he was picking up colonial experience practically with greater speed and thoroughness than he was likely to do at any station; therefore he stifled all unworthy feelings of impatience, and trudged steadily behind his sheep, at the opposite side from Windsor, as if he had been born and bred for the task, like the dog Watch.

That sagacious animal excited his astonishment and respectful admiration. The livelong day he kept trotting backward and forward behind the flock, always keeping at a certain distance, and merely intimidating the lingerers and weakly ones without harshness or violence. If a sufficiently lively crawl was not pursued, he occasionally, by a gentle make-believe bite, gave a hint as to what he could do if necessary. His half-human instinct had plainly convinced him that loudness of bark and general assertion were amply sufficient in the woolly as in the human world to produce the most gratifying submission and acknowledgment of superiority.

About noon the fresh air, the continuous though not violent exercise and healthy appetite of youth, combined to produce a feeling of deep regret that he had not been more provident about lunch. However, Mr. Jack Windsor, drawing over, produced a large parcel containing corned mutton and bread enough for an English labourer's family for a week.

‘I thought, sir, as you’d like a snack, so I muzzled enough grub for two ; I’ve got some cold tea in the billy.’

Ernest noticed that his retainer had commenced to carry a small camp kettle containing probably two quarts, which he nothing doubted held water. This repast was now complete. The friends munched away at the very substantial luncheon as they strolled along behind the ever-nibbling sheep, and after giving Watch a very ample supply, washed it down with nectar in the shape of cold tea.

‘Well,’ quoth Mr. Neuchamp, with a deep sigh of contentment, ‘how comparative are all things ! I never remember to have enjoyed a mid-day meal more in my life. This fresh day air must be a wonderful tonic ; or is it the early rising and Arcadian simplicity of life ? I believe that they insist upon a lot of virtuous behaviour at a cold-water establishment such as the people would never stand in their ordinary lives. But because it’s an “establishment” they let the doctor bully them to bed at nine, get up at six, eat early dinners of mutton chops and rice puddings (how I laughed at a guardsman’s face at Ben Rhydding once when the bell rang at one P.M. and he was marshalled to such a repast), and unexpectedly find themselves placed in possession of an appetite and health again.

‘It’s something of the same sort of thing here. If I had gone a trip with a drover from Tillyfour to London with West Highland cattle, I daresay I should have doubled my appetite and general vitality. There, however, it is not “the thing” to do. Here it is not the best form apparently—but you may carry it off without any accusation of insanity. One thing is certain, I shall never respect good cooking so much again. The cook to cultivate is *yourself* unquestionably. Guard your appetite, keep it in a state of nature, and the rudest materials, if wholesome, provide us with a daily feast, and a measure of enjoyment of which over-civilised, latter-day men are wholly ignorant and incapable.’

CHAPTER X

THE days, after all, passed not so funereally by. The weather was utterly lovely. The wide plain was fanned by delicious wandering breezes. Mr. Neuchamp had ample time for philosophical contemplation, as long as he 'kept up his side' of the flock. If he became temporarily abstracted while musing upon the fact that the ancients travelled their stock for change of feed, probably doing a little grass stealing, when the season was dry—

*"Pecusve Calabris ante sidus fervidum
Lucana mutet pascua"*—

the dog, Watch, would be sent round by his alert comrade to sweep in the spreading outsiders and warn him of his laches. Just before sundown one day the flocks were converging towards a line of timber suspiciously like a creek. The overseer rode up. He looked with approval upon the well-filled flock, now quietly feeding, and thus addressed Ernest—

'Well, youngster, and how do you like shepherding?'

'Pretty well,' he answered; 'it's better than I expected.'

'You and your mate seem to get on very well; the sheep look first-rate.'

'Glad you think so. My mate is a person of experience, so is the dog. It isn't hard to drive a flock of sheep, I find, with two good assistants.'

'Well, I don't suppose you'd have made much hand of them by yourself. However, a man's a man when you're travelling with sheep on a road like this. Don't you listen to those other vagabonds, and you'll make a smart chap by and by.'

'Thank you,' said Ernest, 'I'll try and keep as innocent as I can under the circumstances.'

The overseer rode off, puzzled as to whether the new hand was laughing at him or was 'a shingle short.' Slightly damaged people, whether from drink, disappointment, a lonely life, or the heat of the climate, were, unfortunately, not particularly scarce in the locality.

'Whatever he is, he and that rowdy-looking card can keep

their sheep and feed them first-rate,' he said to himself, 'and that's all I've got to look out for. Perhaps the young one's going jackerooing at Jedwood ; if so, he has more sense than he looks to have.' The month wore on with dreaminess and peace, so that Mr. Neuchamp began to think he would not be so unreasonably delighted to get to Garrandilla. Each day, soon after sunrise, they moved from camp at a pace extremely suitable to the thick-coming fancies which filled the mind of Ernest Neuchamp during the first hours of the untarnished day. There was the glorious undisturbed sun, with autumnal tempered beams. On such endless plains Chaldean and Israelitish shepherds, in the world's youth, had travelled or held vigil. No vast awe-striking ruins lay on these great solitudes. No temple eloquent of the elder races of the earth. But the stars burned by night in the all-cloudless dark blue dome as they sat in nominal watch, and Ernest mused of the silent kings of this mysterious human life, changeless destiny, till the morning star seemed to approach his solitary couch, as did that lonely orb which held converse with Morven, the son of Ossian.

In the daily round of guiding and pasturing he learned much of the complex nature of the under-rated intelligence of the sheep. His companion, Mr. Jack Windsor, had cultivated a habit of observation, and knew, as gradually appeared, something, not always a little, of everything rural.

'Rum things sheep, sir,' he would remark, as he commanded Watch to abstain from troubling and signalled Mr. Neuchamp to come on to his side ; 'I always see a deal of likeness to the women about 'em. If they don't want to do a thing you can't drive 'em to it. No, not all the men and dogs in the country. If you want 'em to do anything particular, pretend you don't wish 'em to do nothin' of the sort. Give 'em lots of fair play, that's another good rule, same as women. When it comes to anything out-and-out serious, act determined, and let them have it, right down heeling, and all the fight you're master of.'

As it was from time to time pointed out, when principles and admonitions came into play, Ernest was enabled to comprehend the many ways in which stock can be benefited when travelling by discreet and careful feeding, halting, watering, and humouring. So that he actually possessed himself of an amount of practical knowledge with which a year's ordinary station life might not have provided him. As for the rest of the men, his easy, unassuming equality of manner had rendered him personally a favourite with them. They held that a fair fight settled everything, without appeal, and having come to the conclusion that Mr. Neuchamp was a swell, presumably with money, travelling with sheep for his amusement—incomprehensible as was that idea to them—they felt that he was in a kind of way Jack Windsor's property, who was likely to be pecuniarily benefited during the stage of Mr. Neuchamp's softness and inexperience. Hence he was in his right to do battle

for him. They would have done the same had they similar golden hopes. And now the matter being over, and 'Bouncing Bob' relegated to a 'back seat' as wit and occasional bully of the camp, they held, after the English fashion, that the discussion could not be reopened. So all was peace and harmony.

One day, as they were sleepily voyaging over the grass ocean, Jack Windsor, who had gone out of his way to look at a man leading a horse, returned with exciting news. The horse aforesaid was young, and in his opinion a great beauty—'a regular out-and-outer' was the expression—and, by great chance, for sale. 'Would Mr. Neuchamp like to buy him? If he wanted a horse at Garrandilla, he could not do a better thing.'

'When you get there, sir, of course you'll want a hack. There'll be no more walking, I'll be bound. You'll have messages to carry, boundary riding to do, cattle-driving, getting in the horses—all sorts of fast work. Well, either they'll give you a stiff-legged old screw, that'll fall down and break your neck some day, or a green half-broken young one that'll half kill you another road. I know the sort of horses the young gentlemen get at a station where a man like Mr. Jedwood's the boss.'

'Very well, what does he want for the colt? Is he a very good one?'

'I haven't seen his equals for years; don't know as I ever saw a better. Why he's fool enough to sell him I can't tell. But it's all square. I know the man, and where his run is; you'd better go over and see him.'

'So I will; but how can he be kept or broken in?'

'I'll break him; I can rough-ride a bit, and will put him among the other horses and short-hobble him.'

Accordingly Ernest went over and saw a noble, good-tempered-looking dark gray colt. He had a large full eye, black mane, legs, and tail, with a shoulder noticeable even amid the rounded proportions of colthood.

'So this young horse is for sale?' he said inquiringly of a middle-aged stout man, like enough to be a brother to their own overseer.

'Yes!' said the man, pulling at the halter, which had galled the colt's under jaw. 'I started to take him down to the lower station, and he's such a brute to lead that he has nearly pulled me off more than once. I won't lead him a step farther if we can deal.'

'What will you take for him?' asked Ernest.

'Well,' said the stranger, 'I believe he's a real good 'un, though he's never been backed yet. I don't know or care much about horses myself; they're useless brutes, and eat more grass than they are worth. I'll take ten pounds for him.'

'Very well,' said Ernest, 'he's mine at that price, and I will send a man over with the money, if you will deliver the horse to him.'

Jack Windsor was overjoyed to hear that the colt was actually bought.

'I can break him easy enough,' he said, with all the eagerness of a schoolboy. 'He is half handled now, and it will be easy for me to back him.'

'But how shall we keep him till we get to Garrandilla?'

'Oh! I'll square it with the chap that looks after the spare horses; there's a mare with them as he'll likely take to. He can't get away far in hobbles anyhow.'

So Jack being sent off with the whole of Mr. Neuchamp's remaining capital, in half an hour returned with the colt at the end of a long halter, and a properly witnessed receipt from John Williams of Boro, which he handed to Ernest.

'I made him draw out a receipt, all regular, and get the nearest man I could cooey to, to sign it. There's no knowing but somebody might claim the colt without this—say you'd worked him on the cross. There's nothing like being safe with a good horse like this.'

Mr. Neuchamp was pleased with his purchase, which he immediately christened 'Osmund,' after an old hunter with a favourite family name at Neuchampstead.

'I'll do nothing but handle him to-day,' said Windsor; 'tomorrow I'll get a spare saddle and bridle, and will tackle him.'

'Good gracious!' said Ernest, 'is that the way you break horses in this country? Have you no cavesson, or breaking-bit, or web surcingle?'

'All them's very well when you've got 'em,' said Mr. Windsor; 'but they don't have saddlers' shops on the plains, and if a man can ride he can do without 'em, and do justice to his horse too.'

So next day Jack procured an old bridle and saddle, the bit belonging to which he carefully wrapped round with rag, thinly increasing its bulk and rendering it fit for 'mouthing' or slightly bruising, *without cutting*, the corners of the lips of a young horse. This and the saddle, by means of patience and persuasion, he managed to get fairly placed and buckled upon Osmund, who objected a little, but finally marched along not very much alarmed by his novel accoutrements. All this time the sheep-driving was efficiently conducted by Mr. Neuchamp and the dog Watch, who amply justified the anticipations indulged in by Mr. Windsor at the time of his purchase.

In about another week they expected to arrive at Garrandilla, when the curtain would rise on the first act of the drama of Colonial Experience, with Mr. E. Neuchamp in the rôle of first gentleman.

Two or three days only had passed when Jack Windsor announced to Mr. Neuchamp that the colt was quite quiet enough to back, and that he would perform the ceremony that very morning, as soon as the sheep were steadied to their first feed.

'Back him, now !' exclaimed Ernest in tones of horror, 'why, he cannot be nearly mouthed.'

'Oh yes, he is,' assented Mr. Windsor, playfully pressing against the bit and causing Osmund to retrograde ; 'he's got mouth enough for anything, and between leading and hobbling he's steady enough to make a wheeler in a coach. When I have finished you won't find fault with him for not being steady, I'll be bound. Just you stand close to his shoulder, and hold him while I get up.'

Ernest, though much mistrusting the preliminary instruction of a week's leading, and the simple addition of a bridle and saddle as being sufficient to take the place of all the two months' lunging, belting, cavessoning, driving, dressing, which had been the invariable curriculum of the colts at Neuchampstead, deferred to his follower's opinion.

'I don't think he's got any bucking in him,' he said ; 'he carries his head too high for that, and his mouth's that tight, I could pull him on to his tail if he tried any tricks. He's a bit frightened, and when he's got over that he'll go like an old horse.'

'I should say that buckjumping was produced in this country by bad breaking,' said Mr. Neuchamp oracularly. 'It all depends upon how a horse is treated.'

'Don't you believe it, sir. Bucking is like other vices. Runs in the blood. I've seen horses that had twice and three times the time taken over 'em that this colt has, and by good grooms too, in good stables, and they'd buck, and buck too till they'd half kill themselves, or you. And as for a stranger, they'd eat him.'

'And how do you account for that?' asked Mr. Neuchamp. 'Why should one horse be free from that particular vice, and another with the same amount, or even more handling, be unmanageable from it?'

'Why do boys at the same school turn out different? It depends upon the families they come of. So it is with the horses. One strain will be reg'lar cannibals, no matter how steady you are with 'em ; the others you can catch and ride away, and they'll be as quiet as lambs, and yet game all the time, as I believe this one of ours is.'

As he spoke he touched the colt's side, and he moved off after the sheep in a steady and confident manner, more like an old horse than a young one. He occasionally stopped and sidled, or indulged in a playful plunge or kick. Of course these little irregularities were only amusing to Mr. Windsor, who was in truth a matchless rough-rider, and wellnigh impossible to be thrown by horses of good family or bad. By the end of the day Osmund was apparently as quiet as a trooper, and when unsaddled and turned out seemed quite at home with the cart-horses.

'Now,' said Mr. Windsor, as they sat at their evening meal,

'you've got, sir, what everybody is always a-talkin' about and never seems to get, an out-and-out good hack, fast and easy and well bred, and a stunner to look at. I'll forfeit my month's wages if he ain't a sticker, as well. These quiet ones are just as game as the savages, and indeed more so, in my opinion, because they can eat and rest themselves better. And I wouldn't sell him, if I was you, if I was offered double what you gave for him.'

'I don't think I will,' said Ernest; 'but surely good horses are easily picked up in this country, if one is a fair judge. There must be such thousands upon thousands.'

'So there are,' replied the Australian, 'but we might be gray before you dropped on another nag like this, 'specially for ten notes. Look at his shoulder, how it goes back; see what loins he has; good ribs; with out-and-out legs and feet. He's more than three-parts bred; and if he don't gallop and jump a bit I'm much deceived. He's a bottler, that's what he is; and if you ever go for to sell him, you'll be sorry for it.'

'Well, I don't think I will, Jack,' asserted Mr. Neuchamp. 'I shall always want a horse while I'm in the country, and I think I shall make a pet of this one.'

For the remaining days, before the 'reporter' entered the Garrandilla gate, to give legal notice of the invading army of fleece-bearing locusts, Osmund was ridden daily, and became more docile and obedient to the *manège* day by day.

As the long lines of sheep, flock after flock, fed up and finally mingled at the Garrandilla gate, a big man, with a distinctly northern face, rode up on a powerful horse and looked keenly at the array of sheep, horses, men, and dogs.

'Where's the person in charge?' he asked of one of the shepherds.

'I believe he has gone to the township,' said the man; 'he'll be here to-night.'

'Have you seen anything of a young gentleman coming up to my station? I am Mr. Jedwood.'

'Not that I know of. There's two chaps with that last flock, one of 'em's a "new chum."'

Mr. Jedwood rode down to the flock indicated, and there discovered Mr. Neuchamp in the act of eating a piece of boiled corned mutton, and looking around in an unsatisfied manner, as if anxious for more.

'You are Mr. Neuchamp, I think, a gentleman introduced by letter to me by my old friend Paul Frankston?'

'The same,' said Ernest, putting down his damper and mutton carefully and standing up. 'I intended to present myself to-morrow morning, after being settled with.'

'Settled with?' said Jedwood, in a tone of astonishment. 'You don't mean to say you've really hired yourself to drive travelling sheep! Not but it's a sensible thing enough to do; still you're the first "colonial experience" young fellow that it ever occurred to within my knowledge.'

'I had reasons for it, which can be better explained by and by,' answered Ernest. 'In the meantime, there is a travelling companion of mine whom I should feel obliged if you could employ at Garrandilla. Jack, come here!'

Mr. Jedwood looked keenly at the ingenuous countenance of Mr. Jack Windsor, and then, after suffering his eye to fall approvingly upon his athletic frame, said—

'There's always employment at Garrandilla for men that know how to work, and are not afraid to put out their strength. What can you do, young man?'

'Well, most things,' answered the Australian, with quiet confidence; 'fence, split, milk, drive bullocks, stock-keep, plough, make dams, build huts; I'm not particular, till August, then I'm a shearer.'

'Can you break horses?'

asked the squatter, 'for I have a lot of colts I want badly to put to work, and I can't get a decent man to handle them.'

'I can break horses with here and there one,' responded this accomplished new-world labourer. 'Mr. Neuchamp and I finished one as we come along, didn't we, sir?'

'You did, and wonderfully well and quickly, too,' assented Ernest. 'I had nothing to do but to hold him. I think I can give my personal guarantee, Mr. Jedwood, if you think it of any value, that Jack can tame any horse in the land.'

'Then you can come up to-morrow with Mr. Neuchamp,' said the squatter, 'and I'll hire you till shearing. Shall I send a horse for you?' he added, addressing Ernest.

'No, thanks, I have my own here; I'll ride him up.'

'You seem to be pretty well provided for a new arrival,' said the proprietor good-humouredly. 'What with your wages in hand, a horse, a man, and a month's character as a travelling drover, you have not wasted your time much, though old Paul seemed quite anxious about you, and wrote several letters.'

On the following morning Mr. Neuchamp had a short interview with his master, the overseer, who was in high good humour, having secured two hands in their place at the township aforesaid, one of them a shepherd, most fortunately, at the right (*i.e.* the concluding) end of his cheque.

'Well, you're going to leave us, I suppose, just as you're getting used to the sheep; but I can't complain, as you gave me fair notice. You've been a month, that makes five pounds each. Here's your money, lads,' with which he tendered a five-pound cheque to each of them. 'Good-day to you, and good luck.'

'Good-morning. You have my best wishes,' said Ernest, making a bow which quite overwhelmed the overseer.

'Here you are, Jack,' said Mr. Neuchamp, as soon as the man of sheep had departed, 'I always intended you to have my share of the profits of this droving transaction.'

'That be hanged for a yarn! I beg your pardon. I mean, I

couldn't think of taking it, sir.' And Jack's face really assumed a most unwon'ted expression—that of genuine diffidence and modesty.

'But you must,' said Ernest imperatively; 'you must take it, in payment for the discovery and breaking of Osmund, besides you will want a fit-out in clothing and other things.' So he cast the cheque at his feet.

'Well, if I must, I must,' said Mr. Windsor reluctantly. 'It's a good while since I was as rich as this, and all on the square, too; that's what gets me. Never mind, sir, if we both live you'll get over-value for this bit o' paper some day.'

It was now time to make tracks for Garrandilla. Ernest did not see any road, or know the precise line of country, but Mr. Windsor taking the matter in hand, they soon found themselves in front of a very small slab cottage, standing solemnly alone, at the rear of which, however, were huts, sheds, farm buildings, and haystacks, in such number and abundance that Ernest thought they must have fallen upon the township by mistake.

Mr. Jedwood, however, appeared at the door, and walking out to meet them, told Windsor to betake himself to the stables, and to remain there until he came out to see him, to feed the horse, and to inquire of the groom, who would inform him where he could feed himself. He then invited Ernest to follow him into the house.

'I am glad to find that you have turned up at last,' said his host; 'not that, of course, never having seen you, I should have grieved overmuch myself if you hadn't, but poor old Paul seemed so anxious that, for his sake, I began to feel an interest in you. If you will walk this way I will show you your room in the barracks—there is a pile of letters for you.'

Ernest felt really pleased to be placed in possession once more of any sort of bedroom, and proceeded to render himself presentable to general society. After these necessary changes had been accomplished, he commenced to look over his letters, of which there were—Americanicé—'quite a number.'

First of all he opened one in the bluff characters of Mr. Frankston, bold, and easily read, as the true heart of the writer. It ran thus:—

MY DEAR BOY—What, in the name of all the rocks and shoals between the Sow and Pigs and Maafu Reef, are you cruising about so long before turning up at Garrandilla? Is the reason masculine, feminine, or neuter? By the bye, Charley Carryall was here the other day. Told me some first-rate yarns—sorry you weren't at Morahmee to hear 'em. Well, but why haven't you fetched your whaling ground—I mean your run—yet?

Antonia was in a great way when she saw the telegram, in the *Evening Times*, that you had been apprehended and locked up for keeping company with 'another prisoner.' Ha, ha, ha! Can't help it, couldn't really! She kept picturing you in a dungeon, and all the rest of it. I said that you would enjoy it for a day or two, during the hot weather. What do you think about walking? Have you got a horse yet? We are all very

middling. Couldn't you square it with Jedwood to come down at Christmas? There's not much work doing then anywhere. The verandah at Morahmee won't be half a bad place about that time, if it's as hot as it was last year. I saw Hartley Selmore the other day. He sold Gammon Downs to a young fellow, just out. My head clerk is rather a queer old character.

'Ah! sir,' he said, 'don't you think Mr. Selmore will go to hell for selling such a place to that poor young gentleman?'

'Really I don't know,' I answered, 'there always seems a sufficient supply of young fellows with a little money and no brains. If they were not gobbled up by the Selmores, some other big fish would be sure to have them.'

However, Antonia said Hartley was a cold-blooded rascal, and I was nearly as bad for making light of his villainy. So I did not take much by my joke.

Stock have fallen since you left town, and will fall more yet if the war does not come to an end, and this very dry season. So your money is all the safer in the bank. Don't on any account invest without consulting me. Work as hard as you like, but don't get sunstroke. Avoid brandy and water; and when you're very tired of wool and bullocks, see if you can't find the road to Morahmee again. Remember me to our Jedwood. He'll keep you up to the mark, unless he's altered.—Your old friend,

PAUL FRANKSTON.

CHAPTER XI

HE who embarks upon an enterprise or commences a course of life involving absolute departure from every early habit and association will invariably be assailed at some stage or period by distrust, even by despondency. It is not in man to complete all the multifarious acts and volitions pertaining to any momentous change without experiencing the strongest reactionary impulses to halt, to doubt, to waver, to retreat.

That Ernest Neuchamp possessed these, among other weaknesses of our nature, we are by no means prepared to deny. But he had one counterbalancing quality which oftentimes stood him in good stead, when on the dangerous declivities of indecision. This compensating element was a habit of reasoning out his proceedings logically before the day of battle. He formed his opinions, arranged his movements, with Prussian deliberation and purpose aforethought. Having decided upon his order of action, he vowed mentally that no infringement upon his plan should be suffered, whatever might be his own ephemeral impulses, even convictions.

Thus he often carried out programmes involving foregone conclusions, with ruthless exactitude against every feeling, taste, and sentiment then and there animating his rebellious mind. 'No!' he would repeat to himself. 'I made my calculations, carried out my reasoning to its legitimate demonstration, when no disturbing element was present. Shall I veer with every shift of wind, consult every sudden instinct or every emotional sensation? No—onward by the true and proved course!'

Steadfastly adhering, therefore, to his sketch-map, on the following morning Mr. Neuchamp accompanied his host on a tour of inspection, and gathered some approximate notion of the character of the stock and station, together with the duties which as an aspirant to the comprehensive study of 'colonial experience' he might be expected to perform.

The somewhat extensive property known as Garrandilla was divided by a river, on one side of which natural boundary the stock consisted of sheep—on the other of cattle. The northern subdivision comprised four 'blocks,' having each five miles

frontage to the Wandabyne, a permanent and occasionally turbulently flowing stream. As far back as thirty miles, the lands were held upon the usual lease from the Crown. Through all this great tract of country no man was legally entitled to travel, save on the road which passed along the course of the river, avoiding only the sinuosities of its course. North Garrandilla consisted wholly of saltbush plains, diversified only by 'belts' of myall and eucalyptus forest. It was therefore held to be appropriate for sheep, to the highly successful production of which it had always been devoted.

On the south side, the 'lay of the country,' as Jack Windsor would have called it, was different. Marshy flats, interspersed with lagoons and reed-beds, extended along, and for several miles back from the river. With this exception the greater part of the area was covered with more or less open forest, while at 'the back,' or the extreme limit of the unwatered region away from the river, were ranges of hills precipitous and heavily timbered, among which the cattle roved at will during the winter season, returning to the low grounds as the fierce sun of the Australian waste commenced to dry the interior water-courses.

At a short distance from 'the house,' Mr. Jedwood's cottage, or hut, as the residence of the proprietor was indifferently designated, stood a roomy, roughly finished building known as the 'barracks.' Here lived the overseer, a hard-working, hard-riding, weather-beaten personage, who appeared to exist in a chronic state of toil, anxiety, and general lack of repose.

Three of the numerous bedrooms were tenanted by young men, upon the same footing as Mr. Neuchamp, neophytes, who were gradually assimilating the lore of Bushland, and hoping to emulate the successful career of Allan Jedwood, or other pastoral magnates. One of these was a far-off kinsman, Malcolm Grahame by name, a steady, persevering, self-denying Scot; while another, Mr. Fitzgerald Barrington, erst of Castle Barrington, County Clare, sufficiently expressed his nationality and general tendencies by his patronymic and titular designation. Lastly was a brown Australian boy, of eighteen or nineteen, very sparing of his words, and prone to decry the general intelligence of his comrades, from a comparison of their woodcraft with his own, in which competition they were, for the present, let us say, manifestly inferior.

Into this society Mr. Neuchamp voluntarily and contentedly entered, holding that his education would be the sooner completed if he graduated, so to speak, before the mast, than from the captain's cabin. To the barracks also were relegated those just too exalted for the men's hut, while not eligible for the possibly distinguished company occasionally entertained at 'the cottage.' Such were cattle-dealers, sheep-buyers, overseers of neighbouring stations, and generally unaccredited travellers whose manners or appearance rendered classification hazardous.

Ernest managed to have a preliminary conversation with Mr. Jedwood, in which the latter gentleman, who was extremely plain, not to say blunt, of speech, put his position fairly before him.

'You will understand, Neuchamp,' said he, 'that, though I feel bound, on account of old Paul, who was a good friend to me in time past, to do what I can for you, you must not look for any great amount of consideration from the overseer, Mr. Doubletides, or from the other youngsters. I hope you will all be treated like gentlemen as long as you stay at Garrandilla, but you will be made useful, and set at all sorts of work, in a way perhaps that may sometimes appear strange.'

'Not at all,' replied Ernest. 'I am as anxious as any one can be to master the details of bush life, and the sooner the better. I don't think you will find any false delicacy about me, whatever may be the practical nature of my employment for the present.'

'Well, that's all right,' said Mr. Jedwood heartily. 'It's the best way, too. I had to work, and devilish hard, too, as a youngster, or I should never have been here as master, I can tell you.'

After this conversation, Ernest was put under the immediate orders of the overseer, Mr. Doubletides, who speedily made it apparent to him that bush life at a large station did not entirely consist of galloping about like Bedouin Arabs and reposing under palm or other trees of grateful shade. Galloping about there was, doubtless; but often the rides were long, weary, and unexciting, with absolutely no shade to speak of, while so continuous was the routine of carrying rations, driving sheep, bringing in working bullocks, carting water to out-stations, and generally performing no inconsiderable amount of hardish manual labour, that Mr. Neuchamp at times felt inclined to adopt the same distrustful view of it all which Mr. Weller took of the alphabet—'Whether indeed it was worth going through so much to learn so little.'

In any riding that might be ordered, Mr. Neuchamp fared sumptuously compared with the other cadets, who, confined to the ordinary station-hacks, were constantly complaining of their roughness, insecurity, or generally unamiable qualities. Osmund, now quiet, well fed, and tended in the Garrandilla stables, to use Jack Windsor's expression, 'went like a bird,' and daily demonstrated the soundness of that gentleman's choice and opinion.

Charley Banks, the Australian youngster, admired Osmund in secret very much, and at length offered Ernest five pounds to boot, if he would 'swop,' or exchange him for a chestnut mare which he, Charley, had bought out of the neighbouring pound.

'She's quite good enough for this work, Neuchamp,' he remarked, 'and you might as well have the fiver in your pocket

as be wearing out your colt's legs for old Doubletides here. Jed-wood will see you far enough before he gives you another one in his place, if you screw him doing his work.'

'And why would he sell or swop him at all, ye little horse-racing divil, that wants to be making a blackleg of yourself at the township races? He's the only horse fit to carry a gentleman I seen this year past, and the very moral of a horse the whipper-in of the Barrington hounds rode.'

'You be blowed,' retorted the son of the soil; 'I don't believe you rode much to hounds in Ireland or anywhere else, or else you would stick on better.'

'Stick on!' shouted the Milesian. 'I can ride with any cornstalk that ever sat in a thing with a pillow on each flap, that you call a saddle. Sure ye'd be laughed out of any hunting-field in Britain if ye took one of them things there.'

'Well, we can stick to 'em when we are there,' sarcastically observed Mr. Banks; 'I'll bet you the fiver I was going to give Neuchamp, you don't sit for ten minutes on that chestnut colt Jack Windsor's coming up here with now, and he's ridden him, now it's the *third* day.'

Charley Banks emphasised the last number of the colt's daily experiences of man, as if no one but an elderly capitalist, with gout or asthma, could possibly decline so childishly safe a mount.

'Done with you!' shouted the roused son of Erin. 'One would think you conceited cornstalks had discovered the horse, in this sandy wilderness of a country of yours, and that no one had ever ridden or shot flying before he came here.'

'I don't know about shooting,' said the lad reflectively, 'but I'm dashed if ever I saw a new arrival that could sit a buck-jumper, even if he only propped straight forward, and didn't do any side-work. Anyway, we'll see in about five minutes.'

Here Mr. Windsor arrived upon a bright chestnut colt, with three white legs, and a blaze down the face, and a considerable predominance of the same colour into the corners of his eyes, thus giving an expression more peculiar than engaging to those organs, when used for the purpose of staring at the rider. In addition to these peculiarities, he had an uneasy tail, always moving from side to side with a feline, quietly-exasperated expression.

'Good-morning, sir,' said Jack to Ernest. 'Good-morning, gentlemen all; fine growing weather.'

'No finer,' said Barrington; 'how are you getting on with the colts?'

'Not bad,' answered the horse-tamer; 'I've backed two a week since I came, and have three in tackle, in the yard now. This one's a fine colt to go, but he's rather unsettled when the fit takes him.'

'Sorry for that, for I've a bet with Mr. Banks here that I'll mount him and stay on for ten minutes. Sure, ye knew, ye artful colonist, that he was a divil; you won't refuse me the

mount, Jack, me boy, breaker to his Highness the Grand Duke of Garrandilla?’

‘Not I, Mr. Barrington, if you’ve got a neck to spare, but you’ll bear in mind yourself—he’s a sour devil when his blood’s up; and mayn’t like a stranger. Though he’s pretty fair now.’

Here Jack slid quietly to the ground and patted the colt’s neck, who snorted, but when soothed was apparently quiet. Barrington gained courage, and taking out his watch, gave it to Ernest to hold.

‘Ten minutes,’ he said; ‘and now I’ll bet you all a couple of pounds each, that if I come off, not one of the lot of ye can ride him up to the stockyard and back.’

The bet was taken all round. Mr. Barrington with a confident air advanced, and getting Windsor to hold the colt closely and firmly, mounted easily and rode off. The young horse apparently took no notice of the change of riders for some time, but walked steadily off along a bank which led to the sheep-drafting yard. Barrington was charmed with himself, and with his mount, whom he immediately decided in his own mind to be an animal of fine disposition, in danger of being spoiled, as was usual in the colony, by rough breaking. As he turned back, after about five minutes’ ride, he concluded to favour the company with a trot. He therefore touched the colt with his heel and slacked the rein.

Now, whether, as was very possible, though a fair and very bold horseman, he did not sit with the glove-like adherence to the pigskin’s surface which characterised Mr. Windsor’s every movement, we have no means of knowing; of matters of fact, however, as eye-witnesses, we can judge. The chestnut glanced nervously back with his Albino-tinged eyes, made a rapid swerve, then a diving headlong plunge, instantaneously arrested. This threw forward the incautious Barrington, while with sudden frenzy the now fully-aroused animal bounded galvanically upward with his back arched, and dropped with his mouth wrenched resistlessly from the rider’s hold and almost touching the ground.

The suddenness of the act, joined with the convulsive force of the propelling power, first tended to place Mr. Barrington in a somewhat leaning position. From this he was prevented from recovering his place in the saddle by the lightning-like rapidity of the recurring headlong plunges. Strong, fearless, and elastic with the glorious activity of early manhood, he made a desperate struggle to retain his seat; but the deerlike, sidelong bounds, instantaneously reversed, gave him no chance. Failing to follow a terrific side leap, his equilibrium was disturbed, the corresponding swerve sundered him and the saddle still farther, while a concluding upward bound on all fours, ‘propping,’ so as to progress backward rather than otherwise, shot him forward as from a catapult, head first and clean delivered.

'Ugh ! ugh ! shall I ever—ugh, ugh—get my wind again ? Ugh—you savage, unnatural son of a—ugh—gun—what right have you to be called a horse at all ? Sure no one but a blackfellow, or Mexican, or a *native*, Banks, me boy, could expect to sit on such a baste of prey. Here's an order for five pounds, Charley, ye villain ; they're good, *as yet*, and now go ride him yourself, and let me enjoy myself looking on.'

Mr. Windsor, on another horse, was by this time in pursuit of the excited animal, which kept snorting, kicking, and otherwise protesting against any other interference with his natural rights.

'He *can* buck a bit,' said Charley Banks, coolly girding himself for the fray by taking off his coat and tightening a leathern strap which he wore round the waist, 'but if you hadn't come forward, Paddy, the first time he propped, he mightn't have gone to market at all. Here goes.'

The chestnut was soon secured by the agile and deft Windsor, and held by that horse-tamer, ready for Charley Banks to bestride. He coolly divested himself of his coat, and advanced with perfectly unembarrassed mien towards the alarming chestnut. Staring with homicidal glare out of his white-rimmed eyes, the successful combatant was standing perfectly still, but in a constrained and unnatural position.

Before putting his foot in the stirrup, Mr. Banks examined with long-practised eye the gear and accoutrements.

'Why don't you have a surcingle, Windsor ?' he said. 'What's a pair of girths to a colt like this ? Call yourself a breaker ? Where's the crupper ?'

'I left them at home, Mr. Banks,' explained the rough-rider. 'Ben Bolt (as I christened him) was getting on so nicely before you young gentlemen came in the way that I never thought of wanting the regular colts' togger. Besides, it don't matter much.'

'Doesn't it ?' demanded the unappeased critic. 'Suppose he sends the saddle over his withers ? How's a fellow to sit him with one leg on each side of his neck ? However, here goes.'

Mr. Banks, having enunciated his sentiments, quickly slipped into the saddle, and putting his feet well home in the stirrups, cocking up his toes, squaring his shoulders, and leaning slightly back, with easy nonchalance commanded Mr. Windsor to let him go.

Freeing the tameless one on the instant, Mr. Windsor retired a few steps, and awaited for the next act in the performance. The colt seemed in no hurry to make use of his liberty. He stood in a cramped, awkward, half-asleep position. Mr. Banks touched him quietly, but he made no response.

'Oh ! hang it,' said that young gentleman, 'I did not bargain to sit here all day. I'll move you.'

Suiting the action to the word, he 'put the hooks on him,' as a jock would have said—in other words, gave him the spurs

so unreservedly that nothing less than the bronze horse of San Marco or the stone charger of the Duke would have borne them unmoved. Ben Bolt did not. It was the match to the powder-barrel. With one wild plunge and a desperate rear which nearly overbalanced him, the nervous but determined animal bounded into the air. After these feats, he appeared to settle down to practical, business-like buck-jumping, impromptu, certainly, but of the highest order of excellence. He certainly *did* 'go to work,' as Mr. Windsor afterwards expressed it. Every known and unknown device which Sathanas could have devised for the benefit of a demon disguised as a horse was tried—and tried in vain. Mr. Banks, swaying easily front or rear of his saddle, never lost head or seat for an instant. Brought up in a horse-loving, horse-breeding district, he was familiar from childhood with every known form of practical or theoretical contravention of equine illegality. He could ride as soon as he could talk, and ere he wrote himself indifferently man, had backed successfully scores of unbroken horses, and ridden for wagers the cannibal Cruisers of more than one stud.

His figure, slight, but very accurately proportioned, was just above the middle height; his features were delicate and regular, with an approximation in the hardly aquiline nose and short lip to the Greek type, by no means uncommon among Australians of the second or third generation. His strength was far greater than was apparent, arising more from the toughness of his muscles than from any great breadth or solidity; and he had astonished the Garrandilla population one day by the ease with which he walked off with successive heavy bags of flour upon his back, when all hands were unloading a dray from Orange.

It was a pretty sight in its way, interesting enough to those who love contests, far from unduly safe, between men and the inferior animals, to see the ease with which the boy's figure followed each frantic movement of the infuriated animal, and with what perfect and apparently instinctive ease he retained his perilous seat. In vain the roused and desperate creature tried stopping, wheeling, sideway and forward, and indeed backward. Nearly blown was Ben Bolt, evidently relaxing the height and elasticity of his deerlike bounds. The victory was decided in favour of the imperturbable horseman, in Mr. Windsor's characteristic speech.

'By the holy poker! Mr. Banks, you've "monkeyed" him enough for one while. He won't try it on with you again in a hurry.'

The victorious athlete was awaiting with a smile of triumph on his lips for the colt to stop and recover his failing wind, when the frantic animal made a last maddened rear, trembling on the balance of falling backwards till the spectators held their breath; then dashing his head violently to the earth as he inverted his position, he stood with arched back and forelegs

stretched out before him, as if he had been petrified in that position.

As he did so the saddle slid over his lowered shoulder, depressed, as in a horse jumping down a precipice, and the girths passing the 'elbows' or projecting joints of the upper leg underneath, moved, loosened and flapping downward towards the hoofs. Mr. Banks, of course, strictly associated with his saddle, could do nothing to arrest its earthward progress. As saddle and bridle approached the animal's ears, he threw up his head with tremendous force, catching the legs of Mr. Banks and casting him violently on to his back, with the saddle spread out above him. That young gentleman, however, held on to the bridle-rein with such tenacity that the throat-lash giving way, it was jerked over the horse's head, leaving the reins in the rider's hands, while Ben Bolt, with a wild snorting neigh, trotted off, free from all encumbrance, or, as Jack Windsor expressed it, 'as naked as he was born.'

Every one looked extremely grave and sympathetic as the heroic Charley sat up with the saddle in his lap, until he, in the mild monotone of his ordinary speech, said—

'That's the fruits of being too lazy to put on a crupper and surcingle, as any man that calls himself a horsebreaker ought to do. Suppose I'd hurt myself, it would have been all your fault, Windsor!'

Then he arose deliberately and shook himself, whereupon they all burst into a great fit of laughter at his rueful and injured air, as if being shot over a vicious colt's head, after ten minutes' buck-jumping, was a trifling annoyance, that the least care might have prevented.

Mr. Neuchamp walked over to the saddle, which he carefully examined.

'Why, the girths are still buckled on each side!' he exclaimed with astonishment. 'How the deuce *could* the brute have got the saddle over his head as he did—as he certainly did?'

'Bedad he did! eh, Charley, me boy? and that's a trick of rapid horsemanship *I* never saw performed before with my own two eyes,' said Mr. Barrington. 'There's many a man, now, in my country, if I were to tell this story, wouldn't believe me on my oath. They'd say it was unreasonable. You might stick them, and they'd never give in.'

'I wish one of them was on that brute's back,' said Mr. Banks, rubbing a portion of his frame. 'I thought I was as right as ninepence, and then to be slewed that way, and all for the want of a strap or two. I hate carelessness.'

'Never mind, Banks, you sat him magnificently,' said Ernest cheerily. 'I never saw such a bit of riding in my life. It will be many a day before any of us can exhibit in the same way. I consider you fairly won your bet. But still I remain unsatisfied about the saddle coming off without breaking the girths. How *did* it?'

'Well, it's this way,' said Mr. Windsor, bracing himself for explanation. 'It's not a common thing, though I've seen young ones do it more than once or twice before. You see, first the horse sticks down his head with his nose on the ground, as if he was jumping down a well. Then he plants his feet right out before him, so as his hoofs and his nose are almost touching; his legs and his neck are all of a line. Young ones generally have a roundish, lumpy shoulder. If the saddle slips over it, and the girths over the elbows, down it must go; and when the horse draws his head backwards out of it, then you have the saddle, like this one here, popped on the ground, with never a girth or buckle broke.'

'So that's the way it's done, Jack, is it?' inquired Mr. Barrington. 'Well, if I'm forgiven for riding that devil once, I'll never tempt Providence again by crossing him as long as I stay at Garrandilla. I'd like to take him home and exhibit him. There's many a bold rider in Clare and County Roscommon, but the devil a one would stay on him for five minutes, I'll go bail.'

'Every man to his trade,' said Jack Windsor. 'Mr. Banks and me have been riding ever since we were born, and it isn't easy to get from under us, I'll allow. But I daresay there's some other games as we shouldn't be quite so smart at.'

'I tell you what,' said Malcolm Grahame, who just came on to the scene of action, 'there's Jedwood and old Doubletides up at the drafting yards, waiting for some of you to come up and help put through those hoggets that got boxed. The old man is swearing just awfu.'

Every one hasted at this intimation to the scene of action, where the dust was ascending in a cloud, curiously reminding Ernest of a Biblical passage.

For the rest of the day, 'Keep them up, wether, hogget, ewe, weaner, slit-ear, near crop,' were the principal terms and phrases interchanged.

Ernest Neuchamp speedily discovered that he had reason to congratulate himself heartily upon the fact that, from the never-ending work at Garrandilla, he was much too tired and sleepy at night to care for conversation, or to desire congenial companionship. Had he craved for such ever so longingly, he would have found it impossible to obtain.

Allan Jedwood, a man of singular energy and indomitable persuasion, had devoted all his powers of mind and body with ceaseless, unrelaxing obstinacy to what he was pleased to consider the main end of existence.

In his case, the reaching and maintaining of an independent pastoral position had been the goal which had stood forth before his eyes, a celestial mount, but slightly obscured by mists of pleasure, extravagance, or sympathy, from his youth up.

In the pursuit of this somewhat restricted ideal, bounded by a good station, a fine herd of cattle, forty thousand sheep, and

a balance at his bankers, he had spared not himself. He had strongly repressed the ordinary temptations, *desipere in loco*, to harmless dilettantism, to amusement, or imaginative contemplation. Tendencies literary or artistic he had none. Everything in his eyes that did not lead directly to the increase or maintenance in good order and condition of his stock, he had eschewed and forsworn as unprofitable, almost immoral. Such was the rigid discipline which he had enforced over his own spirit for long years. From the days that he had been a hard-worked under-overseer, a toiling owner of a small station, a hampered purchaser of a larger one, until now, that he was sole proprietor of a magnificent unencumbered property, he had foregone nothing of this rule and regimen, and the usual effects had followed the causes. Successful labour and unwearied self-denial had created the position for which he had so longed and thirsted all his early life through.

And yet was there a side to this picture which did not call for so much gratulation. In the stern repression, the pitiless starvation to which the spiritual portion of the man had been subjected, the germs of all intellectual and speculative tendencies had first dwindled, then perished.

Unsparring vigilance, untiring concentration upon the daily routine of station work, was no longer necessary to the opulent possessor of stock and station, freehold and leasehold, town and city property. But the habits, inexorably welded into the being of the man, remained fixed and unalterable, when the circumstances which called them forth had long changed, long passed away. Still daily, as of old, Allan Jedwood rode over 'the run,' among his flocks and herds, his men and his 'improvements,' his dams, his wells, his fences, his buildings, his fields, and his teams. At nightfall, returning to the humble unchanged building which had sufficed for his wants for many a year, he spent the short evening which followed the day of hard exercise in writing business letters, or in posting up station accounts; or else, with military exactitude, he arranged with Mr. Doubletides the ensuing 'order of the day,' in which drafting of sheep, shifting of shepherds, mustering of cattle, and bargaining with dealers, took the place of marching and counter-marching, sorties and retreats, embassies and diplomatic manœuvrings.

Of the progress and potentialities of the outer world—literary, artistic, social, or political—Allan Jedwood knew and cared as little as any of his Highland shepherds, frequently arriving from the paternal farm, who 'had not the English.'

In Ernest Neuchamp's zeal for mental growth, for the onward march of humanity generally, and for the particular community with which he was temporarily connected, this stage of arrested development was very painful and grievous to the soul of an enthusiast and reformer. He tried all the units of the Garrandilla world, but he found no rest, æsthetically,

for the sole of his foot. Malcolm Grahame, who exhausted whatever mental vigour he possessed in trying to discover a cure for foot-rot, and in improving a natural aptitude for wool-classing, bade fair to become as complete and as prosperous a bucolic Philistine as Jedwood himself. Fitzgerald Barrington was conversational and discursive enough, in all conscience, but his mental exercise chiefly took the direction of regret for the joyous days he had spent in his father's house and among his own people, whom—not observing any near prospect of a fortune in Australia—he bitterly reproached himself for having ever quitted. Besides, he held no particular views about the destiny of the human race, or of the Australian nation, or of any other race or people but his own. He did not see the use of wasting the life that could be so much more pleasantly spent in hunting, shooting, feasting, flirting, four-in-hand driving, drinking, and dicing, as became a gentleman of long descent (if he only had the money), in bothering and interfering with a lot of low people, not worth caring about and who did not thank you the least bit.

If Mr. Charley Banks had any intellectual proclivities, they had not as yet passed a rudimentary limit. He smoked a good deal, read hardly at all except the sporting compartments of the newspapers, took more interest in the horses of the establishment than in the cattle or sheep, and was always glad of an excuse to get down to the public-house, or to gossip unprofitably in the men's huts.

As for Mr. David Doubletides, he had long since abandoned the idea that reading and writing had any other connection of importance to humanity than the accurate setting down and adding up of station accounts. He was astir at or before dawn, on horseback all day and every day, from daylight to dark, and was often sufficiently tired in the evening to fall asleep with his pipe in his mouth.

This purely objective existence, after the excitement of the first week or two, commenced to afflict Mr. Neuchamp unpleasantly.

'Good heavens!' said he to himself, 'is all the universe to be narrowed down to the number of serrations in a lock of merino wool? to the weight and tallow of a drove of bullocks destined for the market? This half wild life is pleasant enough with the open air rambles on horseback, and the rude occasional labour. But, strictly, as a means to an end, which end is, or ought to be, the getting away from here, and the leading a worthy life in a less uniformly scorching land of monotony and privation,—fancy one doomed to linger on year after year. I see now the natural law which in desert tribes prompts the pilgrimage; without society, comfort, or companionship.'

At this period Ernest commenced to acquire, if they had been needed, additional proofs of the melancholy tendency of all human efforts to crystallise into the narrow unalterable shape of custom.

Nothing, he admitted, could be more praiseworthy and admirable than the energy, the concentrativeness, the unwearied labour which Jedwood had bestowed upon the formation of his position in early life. And now the summit had been scaled, the goal attained, the reward grasped, of what commensurate value or benefit was it, now fully realised, to himself or to others? The contracted field of labour had become a necessity of life. The means, losing their original proportions, had become the end. It was as if an animal, long compelled to a mill-horse round of unrelieved labour for the purpose of grinding a fixed quantity of meal, had, when the task was completed, voluntarily resumed the collar and gone on ceaselessly accumulating an unneeded heap.

It must be confessed that, occasionally, the uncereemonious manner in which Mr. Doubletides ordered Ernest and the other young men to perform any minor task considered by him, Doubletides, necessary to be done, rather jarred upon his feelings. It was—

‘Mr. Barrington, take the old roan horse and a cart, and go out to the fifteen-mile hut with a fortnight’s rations for Joe Watson.’

‘Mr. Grahame, see that you and Banks are up at daylight to-morrow morning, or else you won’t have that weaner flock drafted before breakfast.’

‘Mr. Neuchamp, you had better get away as soon as possible, and look for those five hundred wethers that old Sails dropped at the Pine Scrub yesterday ; take some grub and a tether-rope with you, and don’t come home till you find them.’

All this was doubtless good practice, and valuable as storing up useful knowledge against the day when he should possess a station and a Mr. Doubletides of his own. Still it occasionally chafed him to be ordered and sent about without any explanation or apology for the extreme personal inconvenience occasionally involved.

As it happened, this particular sheep-hunting trip became an adventure of much importance. Riding gaily upon the trusty Osmund, Mr. Neuchamp was fortunate enough, after a few hours’ search, to come upon the ‘wing’ of the wether flock which had been lost by the ex-marine circumnavigator—a blasphemous old man-of-war’s man, referred to by an abbreviation denoting his former work.

Full of triumph, Ernest commenced to drive them in the direction of the out-station, to which the remaining portion of the flock had been sent. For the first hour he sauntered on behind the browsing sheep, confident of his direction and not doubting but that he should reach a spot which he knew in good time. Sheep are not particularly easy animals to drive after a few miles, and it soon appeared to Ernest that the double effort of driving five hundred sheep and steering straight in a country without a landmark, was likely to bear hard upon his woodcraft.

As the sun hung low, flaunting a vast gold-red shield athwart the endless pale green waste, a sense of powerless loneliness and confused ignorance of all but the cardinal points of the compass took possession of him. He cantered from side to side of the obstinate, and perhaps puzzled, sheep, which probably had a distant impression in their woolly noddles that the line of direction lay quite another way. At length the red-gold blazonry faded out into darksome crimson, the pale green shades became dim and dullest gray—the stars rush out, at one stride comes the dark—and it became fully apparent to Mr. Neuchamp that he was lost.

He was sufficiently learned in the lore of the dwellers in this 'land of freedom and solitude' to know that the chief duty of man when once placed in possession of stock, sheep above all, is to 'stick by them'—to stick by them, as the captain lingers by the last plank of the breaking-up deck, in spite of danger and death, hunger, thirst, weariness, or despair. These last experiences were more likely to be the portion of Ernest Neuchamp than the former. Still it needed a slight exercise of determination to face the idea of the long lonely night, and the uncertain chance of discovering his whereabouts next day.

The night was long—unreasonably long—Ernest thought. Sufficiently lonely as well. There were no wild beasts, or robbers, likely to be 'round.' Still there was an 'eerie' feeling about the still, solemn, soundless night. The rare cry of a night-bird, the occasional rustling made by the smaller denizens of the forest, the soft murmuring of the pine-tree nigh which he had elected to camp—these were all his experiences until the stars paled and the dawn wind moaned fretfully, like a dreaming infant. Having no culinary duties to delay him, Ernest saddled up his good gray steed, roused the unwilling sheep, and started forth, ready to do battle with fate in the coming day. Alas! he struck no defined trail. He hit off no leading thoroughfare. At first mid-day, and again the dewy eve, which might have been so described if the autumn rain had come—which it had not—again found Mr. Neuchamp a wanderer upon the face of the earth and no nearer home. As for the sheep, they found sustenance without difficulty, as they 'nibbled away both night and day,' all heedless of the morrow, or Mr. Neuchamp's anxious brain and empty stomach. They apparently had no objection to camp at the deserted out-station, which had so bitterly disappointed Ernest when he reached it at the close of the day.

By this time, in addition to being unmistakably and importunately hungry, Mr. Neuchamp was furiously thirsty. His satisfaction was great, therefore, when he discovered, just outside the door of the empty hut, two hogsheads filled with clean water.

He was about to plunge his head into the nearer one, like an

eager horse, when a sudden thought passed through his brain, and he stopped short, with desire and dread written in every line of his face.

What was the potent thought, the word of power, that sufficed to arrest the step as if a precipice had opened suddenly below his feet to hold back the longing lips so parched and moistureless? One word, lightning-like, flashed along the wondrous telegraph of the brain. That word was 'arsenic!' Ernest looked again at the casks. The water *was* suspiciously clear. He could not trust it. He knew that somewhere in that direction Mr. Doubletides had been dressing the feet of lame sheep with a solution of arsenic. He had seen in the local paper an account of a thirsty shepherd and his horse similarly placed. The horse drank out of one cask, the man from the other. The horse died. Ernest was not sufficiently tired of his life to take a philosophical view of the chances. Sudden death, undignified convulsions, a visit from the coroner—an unsympathetic individual, who declined minute shades of discrimination in favour of 'three star'—'Verdict, found dead, as much arsenic internally placed as would have killed a horse.' All this was uninviting, non-heroic. Bordering on the heroic, however, was the stern resolve to pass the night without tasting one drop of the doubtfully limpid element.

CHAPTER XII

It occasionally occurs to our unresting, unreasonable minds, prone, as we all are, to straining the mental vision and wearying our hearts with efforts to descry the form, to catch the Sibylline words, of the veiled future, that we are not so very wretched in the society of the present. After some slight intervals of sighing for the (social) fleshpots of Egypt, Mr. Neuchamp began to enjoy his life very thoroughly, and to question whether he should be so much happier after he had become a proprietor and carried out his plans of regeneration. The spring had set in, and nothing could be more lovely than the fresh warm air, the gloriously fresh mornings, the cool calm nights.

‘How happily the days of Thalaba went by!’ His health, spirits, and appetite were faultless. It was a time of hope and expectation for the great event of the year. The shearing was coming on, and insensibly the increase of station hands. The putting into order of the disused shearers’ huts, wash-pens, machinery, and woolshed, spoke of impending transactions of importance, and told that ‘the year had turned.’ He had made up his mind, too, that ‘after shearing he would revisit the metropolis.’ There the moon-lighted, sea-washed verandah of Morahmee, with a slight and graceful form pacing thereon, musing ‘in maiden meditation fancy free,’ showed softly yet bright, as an occasional romance gleam through the somewhat prosaic mist of his ordinary day-dreams. It might have been the influence of the pure dry air, of the oxygenated atmosphere, which caused Ernest to become so very light of heart after this heroic resolution. If it were so, nothing that has ever been said by enthusiastic tourists, in praise of the beauty and salubrity of the Australian climate, can be held to be in the slightest degree exaggerated.

Another effect was noticeable about this time. Ernest commenced to be remarked, among his observing messmates, for a suspicious eagerness to learn and acquire all the mysteries of stock farming, some of which he might have previously overlooked. He delighted Mr. Doubletides by his alacrity, and that

grim veteran remarked that in a year or two more he might be able to look after a small station himself, always provided that he had a careful overseer.

'The deuce a bit you'll see of him thin, me ould shepherd-driver, in a year or two, or next year either,' said Barrington. 'I know the signs of it. He's going to cut Garrandilla after shearing, and he's trying to suck ye, like a marrow-bone, of all the fruits of all yer long hard life and experience, me ould warrior. And why wouldn't he? Sure I'd be off myself and invest, if my uncle would only send out the ten thousand that he promised me.'

'*Neuchamp* manage a station!' said Malcolm Grahame. 'He just knows naething whatever about foot-rot, and he disna know first-combing from pieces; it's my deeleberate opinion, he'll just be insolvent within the year.'

'How do you know?' quoth Charley Banks. 'It's half luck, seems to me. I know an old cove that only branded his cattle once about every two years, and he made more money than all the district put together. *Neuchamp's* a good sort of notion about a horse, and he don't drink. I'll lay six to two he ain't broke next year, nor the year after.'

Garrandilla was not a fenced run. It was in the pre-wire-bearing stage, preceding that daring and wondrous economy of labour. At the period of which this veracious chronicle treats, the older pastoral tenants were wont to speak with distrust of the new-fangled idea of turning large numbers of valuable sheep 'loose—literally loose, by George—night and day' in securely fenced but unguarded enclosures.

One thing was certain, they had made their money mainly by the exercise of certain qualities, among which were numbered, beside industry and energy, a talent for organisation scarcely inferior to that required by a general of division. At Garrandilla the twenty or thirty flocks, averaging two thousand each, were marshalled, counted, gathered, dispersed, with the punctuality, exactness, and discipline of a battalion on field duty. Were all these rare endowments, these valuable habits, to be henceforth of no avail? Were the sheep to be just turned loose and seen from time to time like a lot of store cattle? Were experienced shepherds, skilled overseers, henceforth to be unnecessary? And would any young inexperienced individual who had brains enough to know a dingo from a collie, or to see a hole in a fence when such hiatus was present, do equally as well to look after five or ten thousand sheep in a paddock, as the oldest shepherd, under the orders of the smartest manager in the land? These were serious and important questions. Mr. Jedwood was not a man given to hurried outlay. The process of building up his fortune had been hard, anxious, and gradual. He had no idea of reversing the process in any possible casting down of that edifice. Therefore, with the aforesaid twenty or thirty shepherds, ration-carriers, etc.,

it did not admit of doubt as to there being plenty of work at Garrandilla. Of a truth the work was unceasing from daylight on Monday morning till dark, or later, on Saturday night. Indeed Sunday was often spent by Mr. Doubletides in weighing out rations, and making out a few of the men's accounts, as a species of rest from his labours not unbefitting the day.

The process of general management was somewhat in this wise. Each of the young men had certain flocks placed in his charge; these he was expected to count at least once a week. He had a small sheep-book or journal in which the name of every shepherd, with the number of his flock, was entered upon a separate page, as thus: "John Hogan, 14th May; 4-tooth wethers; No. 2380; dead, 5; added, 14; taken out, 52—total, 2337."

A similar account was kept of every flock upon the station, which was expected to be verified by a count at any moment. This counting it was *de rigueur* to perform early in the morning. As the shepherd usually left the yard or fold soon after sunrise, and many of the flocks were ten or fifteen miles from the head station, it followed that the young gentleman who counted a distant flock had to quit his couch at an exceedingly early hour.

Then the ration-carriers, who were always conveying provisions, water, wood, all things necessary to the shepherds, required in their turn supervision.

Nothing but the hardest bodily labours and unsleeping apprehensive vigilance kept this small army in good order and efficiency. If a shepherd lost his flock, there was mounting hot haste and terrific excitement till the sheep were found; Mr. Jedwood riding and aiding personally in the quest as if ruin was awaiting the non-arrival of the flock, to pounce down upon him and his.

There was no denying that the management of Garrandilla was very successful upon the whole. The fat sheep were eagerly competed for by dealers and others directly it was known that they were in the market. The wool brought a good though not extreme price in the home or colonial markets. The station accounts were kept by the storekeeper with the strict accuracy of those in a merchant's office. There was no waste, no untidiness, no delay, no dawdling of any kind. The men were well though not extravagantly lodged and fed, after the manner of the country. They received the ordinary wages, sometimes a shade above them. Whatever they drew from the station-store was accurately debited to them, and they received a cheque for the exact amount of the balance upon the day of their departure. What they did with the said cheque—whether they spent it in forty-eight hours at the nearest inn, whether they kept their money for the purpose of buying land, whether they put it into the savings bank, or gambled it away—was

a thing unknown to Mr. Jedwood, and concerning which he never troubled himself to inquire.

When Mr. Neuchamp, in the ardour of his unquenched philanthropy, questioned him about these things, he declared that he had no great opinion of station-hands as a class, that most of them were d—d rascals, and that as long as they did his work and received the pay agreed upon he really did not care two straws what became of them.

Ernest felt this to be a very doubtful position, as between master and men, and further required to know whether, if he, Mr. Jedwood, took measures to locate a few of his best men with their families upon the frontage to the river, he would not secure an attached tenantry, and be always certain of a better and readily available class of labour.

To this Mr. Jedwood made answer that he should consider himself to be qualifying for admission to a lunatic asylum if he attempted to do any such thing. 'In the first place you would lose,' he said, 'a quantity of your best land, and your best water. In the next place, as their stock increased they would use and spoil double the quantity of land they had any legal title to. Most probably they would *not* work for you, when you needed labour, except at their own price and terms; and if you wished at any time to buy them out, they would ask and compel you to give double the price they had paid. No, no; I've kept free selectors out all these years, and, as long as I live here, I'll do so still.'

So Mr. Neuchamp had again to fall back upon his own thoughts and excogitations. He was not convinced by Mr. Jedwood, who took a narrow, prejudiced view of the case, he contended. But he arrived at the conclusion in his own mind, that the amount of bodily and mental labour devoted to the sheep-pasturing division of Garrandilla was exhaustingly large, and that any mode of simplifying it, and reducing this great army of labourers, would be very desirable.

More and more to him was it apparent daily that there was no cessation, no leisure, no possible contemplative comfort in a life like this. It was the same thing every day. Sheep, sheep, sheep—*usque ad nauseam*.

Garrandilla was a highly unrelieved establishment. There were no ordinary bush distractions. There was no garden. There were no buildings excepting those positively necessary for the good guidance and government of the place. Jedwood's two rooms served him for every conceivable want here below. They really were not so much bigger than the captain's cabin in the good ship which brought Ernest to Australia. But they were large enough to eat, drink, and sleep in twenty years since, and they were so now.

At times a neighbour rode over and spent an hour or two, talking sheep, of course. Occasionally a lady, from sheer weariness or ennui, would accompany her husband or brother,

and beat up the great Mr. Jedwood's quarters for a short visit.

One day Ernest was standing near the cottage in a meditative position, when a gentleman rode up, having a lady on either hand. Mr. Jedwood, with old-fashioned gallantry, promptly assisted the fair visitors to dismount, and then calling out loudly, said, 'Neuchamp, take these horses over to the stable.'

Ernest walked over, and taking the horses mechanically, was about to make for the stable, when one of the ladies exclaimed in a tone of great astonishment, 'Mr. Neuchamp!' He looked up, and to his very considerable surprise recognised one of the young ladies of the Middleton family, his fellow-voyagers.

'Why, what is the meaning of all this?' inquired Miss Middleton. 'I never thought to see you so generally useful; but I understand—you are staying at Garrandilla, and performing the "colonial experience" probation.'

'You have guessed it exactly with your usual acuteness, Miss Middleton,' said Ernest, who, slightly confused at having to act as amateur stable-boy, had now recovered his usual self-possession,—never long absent, to do him justice. 'I will come in as soon as I have stabled the horses.'

When Ernest returned he found the ladies evidently concluding a short narrative to Mr. Jedwood, in which he guessed himself to have figured. Nothing could be warmer or more pleasurable, however, than their recognition.

'And so, Mr. Neuchamp, here we meet, after all our arguments and passages-of-arms,' said the younger sister. 'We are on our native heath, you know, so we shall take the offensive. How do you find all the new theories and schemes for improvement stand the climate?'

'Not so very badly,' assented Ernest boldly. 'I am biding my time, like the Master of Ravenswood. I intend to cause a sensation by carrying them out when I have a station of my own.'

'Oh, you must get one in this district,' affirmed the elder sister with determination; 'it would be so pleasant to have some one to talk to. We are living in utter solitude, as far as a rational conversation is concerned.'

Mr. Jedwood at this juncture 'trusted that, as they did him the honour to pay him a visit now and then, they did not include Garrandilla in the conversational solitude.'

'Oh, you know, you're such an old friend. We can recollect riding to Garrandilla with papa ever since we could be trusted on horseback. It is one of our chief pleasures and resources. But really, Mr. Jedwood, you ought to build a new cottage. I used to think the old hut a splendid place once, but it looks now, you must confess, rather small.'

'Two rooms for one man, and that man an old bachelor, Miss Middleton, are not so very bad. I'm used to the old place. I

can sit there and write my letters, and here, by the chimney side, I smoke my pipe and watch the embers. But I think I must put up a new place, if it's only for my young lady friends. I'll see about it after shearing, after shearing.'

But this promise of a comparatively palatial edifice after shearing had been made, to the young ladies' knowledge, for several years past, and they evidently did not place much faith in it; Miss Middleton asserting that it was lucky Mr. Jedwood had not commenced life at Garrandilla in a watch-box, as he most certainly would have continued the use of that highly compressed apartment.

They all laughed at this, and Mr. Middleton affected to reprove his merry daughter for her sally, but the end of it was that Ernest received a very cordial invitation to visit his old acquaintances at their station, distant about twenty miles, and mentally resolved to take an early opportunity of availing himself of it. The society of young ladies had been entirely out of his line since he had parted with Antonia Frankston, on the verandah at Morahmee. The effect was agreeable in proportion to the period of compulsory withdrawal from such pleasures and recreations.

Truth to tell, he was commencing to weary somewhat of the eternal, never-ending merino drill. He could understand a lad of seventeen or eighteen, like Charley Banks, spending two or three years profitably enough in the Garrandilla grind, and being better so employed than anywhere else. But he, Ernest Neuchamp, was a man whose years and months were of somewhat more value in the world than those of a raw lad. He thought, too, that he knew about as much of the not very abstruse and recondite lore necessary for the average management of a station, as he was likely to acquire in another year, or any greater length of time. He resolved that, after shearing, he would state his case fully to Mr. Frankston, and secure, if possible, that paternal elder's consent to his purchasing a station of his own with his own money.

From time to time at long intervals, whenever by no possibility could any excuse be found for working among the sheep, would Mr. Doubletides summon him, the other youngsters, and any unoccupied individuals that were handy, and crossing the river, proceed to 'regulate the cattle a bit,' as he expressed it. Jack Windsor being a first-class stockman, and handy with the roping-pole, was always invited to join the party. Then they would have a week's mustering, branding, drafting, weaning, fat cattle collecting, what not—and then every one would come back much impressed with the heroism of the whole expedition, and the cattle would be left to their own devices for three or four months longer. These muster parties were extremely congenial to Mr. Neuchamp's tastes and tendencies. He found the country, which was wild and hilly in places, more interesting than the uniform, monotonous, but profitable champaign, where

roamed the carefully-tended merino. There were Alpine gorges, tiny streamlets, masses of foliage, botanical treasures, and above all, a mode of life more irregular, more volitional, than the daily mechanical regularity with which the machinery of the 'merino-mill,' as Barrington profanely called it, revolved diurnally at Garrandilla proper.

Moreover there were occasionally trials of speed, of bottom, of horsemanship, in thus tracking the half-wild cattle to their fastnesses, in which Osmund distinguished himself, and which were more akin to the noble sport of hunting than anything which Ernest had met with in Australia. The driving of the great herd into the stockyard, the drafting, the roping, the branding, the cutting-out, all these were novelties and excitements of a very high order, as they then appeared to the ardent mind of Mr. Neuchamp.

So keenly did he appreciate the general work among the cattle, that upon a recommendation from Mr. Doubletides, who thought all time not absolutely devoted to sheep and wool thoroughly wasted, he was promoted to be a kind of cattle overseer. Then from time to time, in company with Jack Windsor, for whose services he formally petitioned, he was despatched on short but pleasant missions to the cattle station when any particular duty of an outpost nature was required to be done.

Then the friends were in their glory. Jack Windsor had been brought up on a cattle station, and had a strong preference for them as stock over sheep. He always took care to provide an ample commissariat in case of accidents, while Mr. Neuchamp armed himself against the perils of a long evening or two at the hut of the cattle manager by bringing a book. Thus fully accoutred they would start off amid the congratulations of Barrington and Charley Banks for a week's perfect happiness.

Why Mr. Neuchamp esteemed himself to be favoured by fate in being especially selected for this department, was chiefly on this account—that it opened a prospect of change and comparative mental leisure. I have described my hero carelessly and faintly, but the judicious reader will ere this have discovered that Ernest was essentially less disposed to action than contemplation. Not that he disliked or avoided work, but he liked it in large quantities rather than in small, with spaces for consideration and preparation duly interspersed.

For instance, at Garrandilla it was one constant succession of calls and appointments and engagements. 'Would Mr. Neuchamp get something out of the store? Would he make out So-and-so's account? Would he go down and draft So-and-so's flock? Would he be sure to be up before daylight and count the sheep at the Rocky Springs? Mr. Jedwood was returning from the farthest back station, and would he lead a fresh horse to meet him at the fifteen-mile hut? Would he take

out a fortnight's rations to old Bob, and be sure to bring in all the sheepshears? Would he calculate the number of cubic yards in the Yellow Dam, just completed, and check the storekeeper's account with the contractor?' and so on.

Now, all these things Ernest could do, and did do—as did his fellow-cadets; still the endless small succession troubled him. Small wonder, then, that a feeling of relief and satisfaction possessed him when he got the route for Warbrok, and he and Jack packed up their effects and necessities for a week's comfortable, steady, solitary work among the cattle, where no complications existed, and where they saw no one but a couple of stockmen and old Mr. Hasbene, the manager, from the time they left Garrandilla till they returned.

In the long days of tracking the outlying 'mobs' or small subdivisions of the main herd, in the unrelieved wandering through 'the merry greenwood,' with its store of nature's wonders—hidden watercourses, mimic waterfalls, rare ferns, plants, and flowers, strange birds, and stranger beasts—Ernest felt the new delight and enjoyment of a born naturalist. Then the sharp gallops, 'when they wheeled the wild scrub cattle at the yard,' were exciting and novel.

The evenings, too, spent in the rude but snug building that had served the cattle overseer—a laconic but humorous old man who had once been a prosperous squatter—for a habitation for many a year, story-telling, reading, or dozing before a glowing fire, were pleasant enough in their way.

In the ordinary yard work—drafting, branding, roping, throwing, etc.—Mr. Neuchamp felt a strong and increasing interest. When they returned to the merino metropolis of Garrandilla, old Mr. Hasbene expressed his regret emphatically, while Jack Windsor loudly lamented the necessity of going back to school.

'Sheep's all very well,' that gentleman would observe, 'but my heart ain't never been with them like the cattle. There's too much of the shopkeeping pen-and-ink racket about 'em for me. Look at our storekeeper—he's writin' away all day, and sometimes half the night, to keep all the station accounts square. There's Mr. Doubletides, he's always away before daylight, and home at all hours of the night. There's some blessed flock for ever away or having to be counted, or drafted, or shifted, or tar-branded, or sold, or delivered; and it's the same story all the year round. There's no rest and no easy time with sheep, work as hard as you will. Of course the wool's a fine thing, but give me a mob of a couple or three hundred head of fat cattle on the road for market, with a good horse under ye and a fourteen-foot whip in your hand. That's a job worth talking about—a couple of thousand pounds on legs in front of ye—and precious hard work in a dark night, sometimes, to keep it from cuttin' right off and leavin' ye with your finger in your mouth.'

'By George, Jack, you're a regular bullocky boy,' said old Mr. Hasbene; 'you had better get Mr. Neuchamp here to put you on as stockman when he buys a cattle station, as I expect he will when he leaves us. If I was a young man I'd go with him myself, for I see he's got a real turn for the roans and reds, and there's nothing like 'em.'

'Well, we'll see,' said Ernest. 'I have a great fancy for a cattle run; and I must say, I think Jack is right about the sheep. They are a great deal too much trouble, especially with shepherds. I came away from England to lead a quiet life in the wilderness, to have a little leisure and time to think, and not to be hurried from one engagement to another like a Liverpool cotton broker or a stock exchange speculator.'

'I don't say there isn't money made by sheep,' remarked Mr. Hasbene, 'but cattle, to my mind, have always been the most gentlemanly stock. A man does his work; it's sharp sometimes; but then he has it over. He knows what he's about, and hasn't to be always "hurried up" like a Yankee dry goods clerk. I wouldn't change lives with Jedwood for all the world. I live like a gentleman in my small quiet way, but I'll be hanged if he does.'

'Quite right, Mr. Hasbene,' said Ernest. 'The characteristics of "the gentle life," in my estimation, are occasional strenuous, useful, and dignified exertion, seconded by unquestioned leisure, more or less embellished by letters with the aid of the arts and sciences. All this keenness to amass money, land, flocks, and herds, is merely the trading instinct pushed to excess, whether the owner lives in a street in a city, or a hut on a plain. However, we must be off. Good-bye.'

Away they went at the rapid pace so dear to unthinking youth, all heedless of the capital of human as of equine bone and sinew, secure of a vast endowment to their credit in the future, good for endless drafts and extravagant cheques, while the grizzled senior rode back to his lonely lodge to contest, as best might he, with three months' loneliness, three months' absence of human face, of human speech, laughter, or tears. It was not a gay life, certainly, but such as it was, he had lived and outlived twenty odd years of it. In all human probability—he was failing now—he would remain there until he died. So best—where else should he go? Geoffrey Hasbene had once possessed money, friends, a good station, a fair position. But indifferent luck, combined with an easy, careless, liberal disposition, had caused his property to drift away from him. For a time he had suffered some of the evils of neglect and of poverty. Then this prospect of employment was offered and thankfully accepted, and for many years he had been exercising for another the qualities of vigilance and economy that, in the long past years, would have gathered and secured a fortune for himself.

The season wore on. The mild Australian winter, far different from the stern season that Mr. Neuchamp had associated with

that name, changed almost imperceptibly into glowing spring—into burning summer.

The ordinary work of the station advanced. Men came and went ; were hired, verbally ; retained, paid off, and so on, with an undeviating regularity that savoured of machinery.

With spring came all the bustle of washing and shearing. Herds of men arrived at Garrandilla, and were employed as sheepwashers, shearers, extra shepherds, watchmen, engineers, fleece-rollers, and people to do anything that may be required and nothing in particular. Much Ernest marvelled at the apparently profuse and reckless manner in which men were engaged at high wages, until it occurred to him one evening to reckon up, with the assistance of Malcolm Grahame, the probable value of the wool crop. Then he admitted that a few hands or a few pounds, more or less, were not much to be considered in view of such a large quantity of so high-priced and so promptly convertible a commodity.

The general tone of the establishment was altered. Mr. Windsor had completed his colt-breaking business, and having enrolled himself as a shearer, was living in a state of luxurious freedom from any kind of work, and waiting with twenty or thirty other gentlemen, apparently of independent means, the important tocsin which tells of the commencement of shearing.

Barrington and Grahame were galloping about all day long, from the shed to the wash-pen, looking important and mysterious, while Mr. Banks was permanently located at the latter place, and evidently considered himself as in a great degree responsible for the reputation of the Garrandilla clip in the forthcoming wool sales.

For Ernest, to his great satisfaction, employment had been found at the cattle station, an unusual number of fat stock having been sold and delivered at this particular season, so that he and Jack Windsor had been mustering and drafting and partly delivering the said beeves, until it was time for the latter gentleman to take his place among the braves, who, when on the war-path, on the far plains of the north-west, are, sometimes inaccurately enough, styled and designated shearers.

Thus it came to pass that Ernest grew to consider himself more immediately connected with the 'cattle side of the run' than the sheep ditto, and insensibly began to imbibe those prejudices in favour of one description of stock, which, though not capable of logical justification, are often found to be sufficiently powerful to influence a man's whole life.

At last, after many minor combats and skirmishes, a strike among the sheepwashers, a demand for more pay from the shearers, a short supply of carriers, a threatened superfluity of clover-burr and grass seed—the great shearing campaign was completed.

The men were paid off ; the teams wool-laden departed ; the shepherds returned to their homes—save the mark ; Mr. Jedwood

departed for town ; and for a little space it really seemed as if the genius of bustle would revisit Garrandilla—‘nevermore.’

Mr. Jedwood had told Ernest, before leaving, that if he particularly wished to visit town before he returned he was fully at liberty to do so, as Mr. Doubletides would be able to manage all there was to do for the next three months, with the other youngsters, or even without them.

Before he left town, Ernest would have scouted the idea of leaving Garrandilla under a full twelvemonths. But circumstances, it is said, constantly alter and affect cases.

The circumstances were—extreme heat ; waveless uniformity, not to say monotony, of existence ; the lack of fresh companionship ; and, finally, a strong, impetuous, sudden desire for civilised life, coupled with an undefined, unrecognised longing for the criticisms of Antonia Frankston upon his new and thrilling experiences.

CHAPTER XIII

IN no way does the proof more plainly reach us of the sadly shortened space of mortal life than by the distinct stages of experience and mental growth.

Looking back upon the ideal fruition of a few years, we are startled to find how far we have progressed from a given starting point. The store of ripened experience would almost overwhelm with its garnered richness, did not fate, with a malicious pleasure, forbid our profiting by it.

A few lustra have rolled over, marked by fast whitening or receding locks, and lo! we have attained to exact conclusions concerning many things. No further fees are necessary. Cautious are we now who once were so heedless. Regular and methodical in business, erst unpunctual and dilatory, we preserve our acquittances. We are industrious without spasmodic energy, cool with the discretion, not the madness, of valour! But one bright-haired goddess has departed with our golden youth. Hope lends no gladness to the summer breeze, gilds not the glowing eve, smiles not on the flowers, beckons not from the cool shadows of the murmurous glade.

Mr. Nêuchamp was far on the hither side of these autumnal effects, so it chanced that on one fine day—there had been no rain for about two months—he found himself mounted on Osmund with his face turned towards the Sydney road, and with an unwonted feeling of exultation in or about the cardiac region. He was accompanied by Jack Windsor, who had invested a portion of his shearing cheque in the purchase of Ben Bolt, on favourable terms, as that interesting animal had thrown every other one who had ever ridden him, causing Mr. Jedwood to be honestly glad to be rid of him.

Mr. Windsor had completed what he called a very fair spell of work, for him, and having secured a prominent cheque and a high character at the settlement, after shearing, was in charity with all men, even the police, and much minded to have a pleasure trip 'down the country,' as he phrased the transmontane towns. Hence, when Ernest invited him to accompany him to Sydney, having extracted a confession that he had never

seen that 'kingdom by the sea,' or indeed had been a stroller by the 'poluphloisboio thalasses' at any time, he readily and gratefully accepted the offer.

'Seems queer, sir, doesn't it, that I've never seen our main city or the big waterhole, as the blacks call it? Somehow I've always had the luck to miss it. Not that I had any powerful great longing to go. I've always had some pleasant place nigh home to spend my Christmas in, after I'd made a bit of money; and somehow, when I was once comfortable I didn't care about stirring.'

'But I wonder that an active, intelligent fellow like you, Jack, never made up your mind to go all the way to Sydney, out of curiosity.'

'Well, it is a wonder, sir; only, somehow I've had no eddication, as I told you before, and chaps like me, as don't know much except about bush things, haven't as much curiosity, I think, as other people. Sydney's only a bigger town than Campbelltown, or Yass, or Goulburn, and what's there to see in them if fifty of 'em was rolled up together? That's the way I used to talk.'

'But, the sea, Jack, the sea! you haven't the sea in Yass or Goulburn.'

'Oh, I know that, sir. Bless you, now I am quite different, since you took the trouble to learn me to read and write a bit,' (Mr. Neuchamp had so utilised the evenings at the cattle station and other quiet places.) 'I'm always thinking what a stupid beggar I've been to have been contented with the life I used to lead. Just like an old working bullock in a lucerne field, grubbing away and never raisin' his head till it was time to lay down. You've made a man of me, sir, that's what you have. I hope I'll be able to make you think some day—"Well, he wasn't a bad fellow after all."'

'I think so now, Jack; I always have thought so from the first time I saw you.'

Mr. Windsor here groaned out a curse upon some one of Eve's daughters unknown to this chronicler.

'What a regular more-pork I was to be sure, to go and run my neck agin' a roping-pole, and all for a—false jade, who'd have come to see me hanged, I believe, and laughed at the sight—blank her.'

'You are not the first man, Jack, and will not be the last,' quoth Ernest, 'who has been started on the downward road by the same agency. But I hope you will always perceive, when accusing another, that unless you had been that particular sort of fool that bad luck is exciting one to turn into a rogue, her influence would have been quite insufficient. We may as well drop the subject, for ever; but it will do you no harm to look sometimes, without witnesses, at the precipice you passed so closely.'

Mr. John Windsor, naturally one of the cheeriest of mortals,

for which temperament he had to thank a Milesian ancestress, showed no inclination to revert to this painful topic. On the contrary, as they approached the more settled country which lay between Garrandilla and the railway terminus, he entertained Ernest much by his naïve and acute observations. His companionship was always valuable in other respects. He knew all the by-tracks and short cuts, by availing themselves of which the road was materially shortened.

At nightfall, wherever they happened to be, Jack took all charge and responsibility as to the horses out of Ernest's hands. He saw that Osmund received full justice in the inn stables, if they happened to stay at one of the village hostelries; or if compelled to turn out he affixed the hobbles, and following the track (slotwise) at dawn of day, regularly and efficiently produced the hackneys saddled and accoutred at the proper after-breakfast hour. Full of anecdote, flavoured with the purest Australian slang, all unconsciously used, he was a never-failing mine of interest and amusement.

They passed the railway terminus, as Ernest had decided to ride down the whole distance, being not unwilling to exhibit Osmund, now 'prompt in his paces, cool, and bold,' and after the summer grasses of Garrandilla, sleek and 'on his top' in point of condition. He pictured himself cantering along the pleasant seaside ways around Sydney, and if a vision occasionally mingled with his reveries of a fair girlish shape, all the more graceful in the riding-habit of the period, not far from his side, was it not the natural outcome of the double summer time, the pleasant season of the land, and the fairy-time that comes but once—the thrice golden spring of youth? With these 'companions of Sintram' not ominous and threatening, but full of high hope, of purpose, and of all mighty dreams, pleasantly he paced on over the rocky, fast-descending mountain tracks.

'Rum road this, sir, for coaching,' said Mr. Windsor. 'I've been up and down here many a time, by night and day, good weather and bad, in the old times, many years before the Zig Zag was chopped out of the sidelings. I've been glad enough to see the bottom of the hill at Mount Victoria, once or twice, with a queer team and the brake not over good.'

'I should say if anything happened to *that*,' said Ernest, looking over the sheer drop of a couple of hundred feet which overhung the rugged boulders below, 'the insured passengers would have a chance of realising on their policies, as a Yankee would say.'

'Things went something in that line one night, when I was aboard,' answered Jack, a little thoughtfully. 'I never want to see another start like it. Once is enough of that kind of fun.'

'What was that?'

'Well, sir,' commenced Jack, settling himself on the watchful, untamed animal, who thereupon promptly assumed an atti-

tude of armed vigilance, which caused Mr. Windsor to dig the spurs into him and adjure him to do his worst, 'it was this way—

'It was a dark, wet, stormy night, the roads fearful; we were that heavy loaded that it took all Sacramento Ned could do (he was a Californian, and the best whip I ever saw that's seen a few, and that before King Cobb was heard of on the Sydney side) to keep from going over in some of the waggon tracks. I was on the box with him, and we'd made friends like, as he could see I was a bit in the horse line.

'He was a great tall, powerful chap, with a big, fair beard, and the way he could rattle five horses and a loaded coach in and out of the creeks and winding bush tracks, was a sight to see. Well, he'd been very down-hearted all day about something, and at last he says to me, "Jack, old man, I can't tell what in thunder's come over me this trip; it's my last one on this line, for I've saved up a fairish pile and I'm going back to my people, to turn farmer in the old state for the rest of my days; I suppose it's the infernal weather. Well, here we are; look alive there, you chaps. Hold the reins for a minute, Jack, while I look at the brake."

'Well, the fresh team was waiting by the door; they're desperate punctual, those American chaps, and the time was none too much as they had allowed them then.

'I could hear him sing out for the blacksmith, whose forge was nigh the inn—he contracted for their work. When he came, he swore at him in a way *that* man hadn't been used to; by George, he *could* swear when he tackled it, though he was a quiet chap as didn't talk much generally.

'Well, he made him put in another bolt, and said he should report him to the road manager; then he took hold of the reins the three leaders was hitched to, and away we went.'

'He wasn't intoxicated, I suppose?' inquired Ernest.

'As sober as we are now, sir. For when he got up, he says, "I'd have been all the better for a nip, Jack, but just because of the place being risky, and the night extra bad, I wouldn't have one." We had the five lamps, of course—two on each side, two higher up, and one a-top of all. Ned lit a cigar, pulled on his gloves, and off we went.

'The team was in grand order, three leaders and a pair of great upstanding half-bred horses at the wheel, all in top condition and fit to pull any fellow's arm off. However, they'd a *man* behind 'em, and when they jumped off he steadied 'em as easy as a pair of buggy horses.

'You know what the road's like. We rattled along a fair pace, but well in hand, though the horses pulled like devils, and I had my foot on the brake, on the near side, just to help him.

'We were about half way down, and I was wondering what time we should make Penrith, when I felt the near wheeler make a sudden rush, and Ned said in a thick, changed voice—

"By —, the brake's gone!"

"You don't say so," says I; "it can't be."—"You'll darned soon find out, Jack," says he, gathering up the reins and bracing himself for the struggle with death. "Blast that infernal blacksmith, he ought to be along with us now."

'By this time the team had broken into a wild gallop, and were racing down the narrow winding road, with a couple of feet, sometimes less, between us and a five-hundred-foot drop among the rocks. There was no breeching harness on the wheelers; Americans don't use it, but trust all to the brake. Ours was gone. And the pace we were going down that road was enough to scare the boldest man that ever handled leather.

'Ned was as cool and determined as if it was a saltbush plain. He held the mad team true and straight, and trusted, I could see, to pulling them up on the long flat at the bottom of the hill. If we got there. *If!* Of course, the only little chance was to let them go best pace and guide them. The slightest pull up would have sent us sideways over the black rocks, half a mile below.

'It was a strange sight, I tell you, sir. Ned's face was pale but set hard, the muscles of his arms showed like cords, his eyes shining and steady, looking forward through the dark; the great lamps, swinging wide with the rolling of the coach. As we turned one corner we hung nearly over the cliff, just shaved it. The women inside kept up a dismal screaming; the men looked out and said nothing.

"We may do it yet, Jack," he said, "if we can clear those cursed guard-logs near the bottom."

"Right you are, Ned," says I, to cheer him. I was afraid of them myself.

'Now, a'most at the bottom of the hill the road had been new metalled, and as the track was broader and clear of the sideling, the road contractor, damn him, had placed a whole lot of heavy logs on both sides of the metal. I never could see the pull of it myself, except to make accidents easy.

'Well, at the last corner, Ned had to keep as near as he dared to the edge to turn the coach. The pace was frightful by this time, the coach on the swing; and before he could get in from his turn she hit one of these ugly butts and, balancing for a bit, fell over with a crash that I can hear now, dragged for a second or two, then lay on her side with the top wheels still going round and the team struggling and kicking in a heap together.

'I don't know how many rods I was pitched. But when I found I wasn't killed I picked myself up and went to help out the insides. It was an ugly sight. Some were frightened to death, and wouldn't stir. Some had broken limbs. Two were dead—one woman with her baby safe in her arms. We got 'em all out of it with the help of those passengers who, like me, were only shaken a bit.

"There's something wrong with Ned," says I, "or he'd have

been among us by this time. There's *one* lamp alight, fetch it along." So we looked about and round, and after a bit we found him lying on his face with his whip in his hand, stone dead. Poor Ned!

'A sad and terrible accident,' said Ernest. 'What did you all do?'

'We straightened the horses after a bit—there was two dead and one with a broken leg of *them*,' and I rode horseback to the next stage and sent a team back for 'em. They got in next day. But I shall always think poor Ned had a kind of feeling beforehand.'

'It was not his fault, poor fellow.'

'Fault, sir? he was the carefullest chap I ever see. It all lay between that idle rascal of a blacksmith and the wooden-headed road contractor that put them guard-logs down.'

'It is safer on horseback, as we are,' remarked Mr. Neuchamp, 'unless we travelled as I did coming up. I rather prefer a horse, though, I must say.'

'Well, it seems more natural like,' said Jack reflectively, giving Ben Bolt a playful touch with the spurs, which caused that tameless steed to jump on one side in a fashion that might have been dangerous to a less resolute horseman. 'Nothing like a good horse under a man; then he's ready for anything or anybody.'

Once more the great meadows and broad river, majestically winding, which needs but the ruined castle on its scarped sandstone cliff to render it in some aspects equal in picturesque beauty to the 'castled Rhine.' Once more the semi-tropical warmth; the soft, luscious, enervating breeze of the southern seas; the half-effaced traces of ancient labour; the patient, plodding industry and general evidence of village life.

Ernest pressed on until they reached Walton's inn, where he took it into his head to stop for the night before they reached Sydney. Drawing rein at the door, he left Osmund in charge of Mr. Windsor, and marched into the clean taproom with a considerably altered air and general expression from those of his first visit.

The old woman was absent, but Carry, hearing some one in the room, came hastily in and stared for a moment in astonishment.

'Well, I declare,' said she at length, 'if it isn't Mr. Newchum! How you have altered; got so sunburned too. I hardly should have known you. Well, it's very good of you to come and see us again. Mother will be ever so pleased.'

'I thank you for your welcome, Carry,' said Ernest, smiling at the honest pleasure so clearly shown in the girl's face; 'I have a servant with me and two horses—can you put us up for the night?'

'Oh yes. George will be round directly, if your man will take the horses into the yard. So you're not walking now?' asked she, with rather a mischievous look.

'No, Carry, it takes too much time, not that it isn't pleasant enough; but I suppose I shall get into all your lazy ways in time. Mind you take care of my man; he's a capital fellow and a favourite of mine.'

'Is he a native?' asked the girl.

'Yes, a countryman of yours,' said Ernest.

'Then he can take care of himself,' said the damsel decidedly. 'I'll show you your room, sir, and see about your tea.'

It may be safely held that nothing is much more enjoyable in its way than a snug roadside inn, where the host and attendants are cheerfully willing to minister to the comfort of the wayfarer. The food may be plain, the cooking homely, but the prompt and unchilled service atones fully for want of artistic merit; and if the traveller carries with him the inimitable condiments of appetite and reasonable fatigue, the simple meal is a banquet for the gods, and sweet sleep arrives without delay to lull the satisfied traveller into luxurious dreamless rest.

Mr. Neuchamp thought that no club dinner had ever more thoroughly satisfied his every sense than the broiled steak, the fresh butter, the toast and eggs, all placed upon a snowy tablecloth, which the neat-fingered Carry put before him.

Before retiring, Ernest made a point of visiting his horse, as should every horseman worthy of the name. He found that trusty steed and the uncertain Ben Bolt up to their knees in straw, with their racks full of well-saved oaten hay, than which no horse, from England's meads to the sand-strewn pastures where the desert courser roams, can desire better provender.

In returning from his excursion he chanced upon a *partie-carrée* composed of George Walton, his mother, sister, and Mr. John Windsor, who was evidently the lion of the evening, to judge by the way he was holding forth, and the respectful admiration with which his tales of flood and field were received. Among these moving adventures Ernest caught the sound of some reference to a sailing match, in which, as usual, fortune had smiled on the brave. Knowing that the mighty ocean was as yet a wonder unwitnessed by the bold Australian, this experience struck him as improbable, to say the least of it. However, he always permitted Master Jack to encounter his *monde* after his own fashion, not doubting but that his ready wit and fertility of resource would bring him forth unharmed of reputation.

On the following morning, therefore, after a breakfast worthy of the glorious supper which he long afterwards recalled, horses and riders in exuberant spirits, they set forth for the easy concluding stage.

The household turned out to witness their departure.

'It puts me and my good man in mind of old times,' said the aged hostess, 'to have a gentleman stay the night and see horses like them in the stable again. Not as I like that chestnut willin.' (Ben Bolt, by the way, had nearly settled George Walton's

career in life, permanently if not brilliantly, as he unguardedly approached the 'irreconcilable.') 'It's done us all good, sir, and I hope you won't forget to give us a call when you're leaving town.'

'It has done *us* good, I can vouch for,' said Ernest heartily, as he observed his follower's bold eyes fixed upon Carry's features with unmistakable admiration. 'I shall always think of you all as my earliest friends in Australia. Good-bye, George, good-bye, Carry—we must pay you another visit when we start back, after our holiday is up.'

'That's something like a place to stop at,' observed Mr. Windsor, in a tone of deep appreciation, as they passed cheerfully onward, after a mile or two's silence. 'Real nice people, ain't they, sir? What a house they must have kept in the old coaching days! One thing, they wouldn't have had time to have waited much on us then, with the up coach leaving and the down one just coming in, and the whole place full of hungry passengers. How did you ever come to find the old place out, sir?'

'It was the first inn I saw in Australia that took my fancy, Jack. I had had many a cruise on foot in England; gentlemen often take a walking tour there for the fun of the thing; you know the distances are not so great, the weather is cooler, and there is every inducement for young strong men to ramble about the green hills and dales of old England, where you may sit under the walls of a ruined castle a thousand years old, or watch the same sort of trout in the brook by the monastery that the monks loved on their fast days centuries ago.'

'That must be jolly enough for a gentleman with his purse full of money and his head choke-full of learning, knowing all the names of the people as lived and died there before he was born. But for one of us chaps, as can't see nothing but a heap of old stones and a lot of out-and-out green feed, why there's no particular pull in it.'

'But there's nothing to hinder a man like you from knowing as much as other people in a general way, if you can read. Books are cheap, and plentiful, Heaven knows.'

'Well, sir, it does seem hard for a fellow like me to know very little more than a blackfellow, as one might say; that's how lots of us takes to drink, just for want of something to think about. Sometimes it's easy to do a chap good.'

'But it always ruins a man in the long run, perhaps kills him right out.'

'That's all very well, sir, only look at his part of it: a man comes in from a long spell of bush work—splitting, fencing, dam-making, cattle-droving, what not—into one of these bush townships. He's tired to death of sheep and cattle or gum-trees; or perhaps he's been in some place, all plains for a hundred miles with never a tree or a stone; all he's seen has been the

overseer to measure his work, his mates that he worked with, the regular tea, damper, and mutton, day after day ; perhaps flies and mosquitoes enough to eat him alive. Well, he's had a year of this sort of thing, perhaps two ; say he's never smelt grog all the time.'

'All the better for him too,' said Ernest ; 'see what splendid hard condition he's in ; fit to go for a man's life.'

'That's all right, sir, but he's so precious dull and hungry for a change that he feels ready to go to h—l for a lark, as the saying is ; so he comes to the public-house bar, in some hole of a bush township, and the first glass of grog he gets makes him *feel like a new man, in a new world.*'

'Well, why doesn't he stop there?'

'He can't,' continued Jack, 'else he'd slip back, so of course he takes another, and the stuff is ever so bad, rough, very like tobacco in it, or some rascally drug, but it's strong, and it's the strength he craves for, from the tips of his fingers to the very inside of the marrow of his bones ; when that glass is swallowed he has forgotten that he is a poor, ignorant, working man ; he *knows* he's a sort of king ; every good thing he's thought of in his life is a-coming to him ; he's to be rich, happy, clever, able to marry the girl he likes ; if any man looks at him he can knock his head off—ten men's heads off ! Drink ? Fifty glasses wouldn't make *him* drunk ! Capital grog it is too ; feels more sober every glass he takes ; landlord's splendid fellow ; must have some more drink ; and so on.'

'But how do you know a man has all these grand ideas ? I grant it's enticing.'

'Because *I've passed through it all myself*,' said the henchman grimly, yet with a half air of shame and regret. 'I've been on the burst, as we call it, more than once or twice either, worse luck.'

'I hope you never will again, Jack.'

'I *think* not, sir, if I know it. But a man shouldn't be too sure. It's an awful craving, by ——. It drags you by your very heart-strings, once you get it right.'

'But you don't mean to say there's any fun in a week's drink at a wretched pot-house, even if the first hour is as good as you say. Then the waking up !'

'But there *is* fun in it,' persisted the poor relation, 'else why do hundreds and thousands do it ? All these chaps are not fools, much less lazy ; it's the hardest workers and best hands among us working chaps that's the worst drinkers, by odds. As to the waking up, as you say, it's bad enough, but a strong man gets over it in a day or two, and tackles his bread and meat, and his work, pretty much as usual till the time of the next spree comes round.'

'But what a fool a man must think himself,' said Ernest, 'at the end of a week, when he finds that he has spent all the fruit of a year's labour, and is obliged to begin another solitary weary year.'

'It is bad, as you say, sir. You're quite right; but right's one thing and human nature's another, in the bush, anyhow. I remember coming to myself in the *dead-house* of a bush inn once, and I felt like a dead man too; the parson had been preaching at our woolshed the week before, and that text came into my head, and kept ringing through it like a hundred bullock bells.'

'And what was it, Jack?'

"In hell he lifted up his eyes." I ain't very likely to forget. He gave us a great dressin' down for drink and swearing, and bad ways, and so on. We deserved it right enough, and his words struck.'

'What did you do then?'

'I just crawled into the bar, sir, and when the landlord gave me a nip I put it on the counter and bent down to it; blessed if my hand wasn't too shaky to hold it.'

"How much is left of my cheque?" says I. "Forty-three twelve six, it was."

"Not a blessed shilling," says he; "you've been treating all round, and having champagne like water; it ain't likely a small cheque like that would last long."

"Give me a loaf," says I, "and we'll cry quits." A bushman never disputes his grog score. If he's been a fool, he's willing to uphold it. So off I went and walked straight along the road, and slept under a tree that night. Next day I was better; and the third day I got a billet, and was as well as ever I was in my life. I had one or two spees after that, but never such an out-and-out desperate one again.'

Ernest Neuchamp looked at the clear eyes and healthy bronzed skin of the man as he spoke, noble in all the marvellous grace and strength of godlike youth, and thought how deep the pity that such a spirit, such a frame, should sink into the drunkard's nerveless, hopeless, shapeless life in death.

He rode onward more than a mile in silence and deep thought, then he spoke—

'I cannot say with truth, Jack, that I feel inclined to abuse and condemn wholesale everybody and everything connected with intemperance, casual or habitual. I see in it a habit—say a vice—to which the most energetic, intelligent, and industrious of our race have been prone since the dawn of history. Where circumstance is invariable there must be an underlying law. I forget, you don't understand this sort of talk. But, you will admit that it's a bad thing—a thing that grows upon a man till it eats out his will, like a grub in the root of a plant, and then, man or plant withers and dies. Now you're a practical man of wide experience, you know that I mean what I say chiefly, and I want to see my way to do good in this matter. What's the likeliest cure, in your opinion?'

'As to that, sir,' said Mr. Windsor, settling himself so suspiciously in the saddle, that Ben Bolt arched his back and

made ready for hostile action, 'I should be cock-sure that having an empty cobbra, as the blacks say, was on the main track that led to the grog-camp, only that the best eddicated chaps are the worst lushingtons when they give way at all. Perhaps they remember old times too well, if they've come down in the world. But I've noticed that a working man as likes reading, and is always looking out for a new book, or thinks he knows something as will alter the pull of money over labour—he's a very unlikely card to drink much. If he gets a paper with a long letter in it, or a working man's yarn in a book, he goes home as happy as a king, and reads away to his wife, or sits up half the night spelling it out. *He* don't drink. Even if he spouts a bit at the public, he talks a deal more than he swipes.'

'I am quite of your opinion, Jack ; the more a man knows, the more he wants to know. Then he must read ; if he reads steadily all his spare time, he finds his drinking companions low and dull, and thinks it a great waste of time to be shouting out foolish songs or idle talk for four or five hours that would put him half way through a new book. Besides, he has become good company for himself, which your drinking man is not.'

'That's the best reason of all, sir,' heartily assented his follower. 'It is hard lines on those chaps that can only talk about horses or cattle, or crops, or bullock driving. When they're by themselves they can only sulk. It's natural that they should want other men to talk to, and then it's hard work to make any fun without the grog.'

'And there's another very powerful beverage,' continued Ernest, 'that has been known to preserve men from the snare of strong drink, when nothing else would.'

'What's that, sir ?'

'The influence of a good woman, John. The hope to win her some day by prudence and self-denial ; the endeavour to be worthy of her ; or the determination to give the best part of one's life to the comfort and happiness of her and her children, after she is a wife.'

'By the holy poker, sir,' shouted Mr. Windsor, roused out of his usual cool demeanour, 'you've just hit it there ; there's no man worth calling a man, as wouldn't work himself to skin and bone, and suffer thirst till his tongue hung out, if he could make himself of some account in the eyes of some women I've seen. There's a girl that we saw no later than last night, sir—you know who I mean ; by George, if she'd only hold up her finger I'd live on rice and pickles like a Chinaman to the end of my days, and sniff at a glass of grog like old Watch does.'

'Very good resolution, Jack ; and Carry Walton is as nice a girl, and as good, I'm sure, as ever tempted a man to make good resolutions. I quite approve of your taste. Indeed, she's a great friend of mine, and if you like to show what stuff you

are really made of, I'll see what I can do to give you a helping hand.'

John Windsor did not speak for some time. He looked before him for a few seconds as if watching the far sky-line on the great primeval wastes where his youth had been passed. Then he turned with a grave and sobered expression, very different from the one habitual to his somewhat reckless demeanour. 'I don't like to say much, sir—talking isn't my line, when I mean anything—but if you're good enough to be bothered with me for a year or two, and if I get that girl for a wife, and keep her as she ought to be kept by my own industry, you'll have a man as will work for you, ride for you, or fight for you, as long as you want any one on this side.'

'I know that, Jack,' said Mr. Neuchamp, looking feelingly at the heightened colour and speaking expression of his follower; 'and if I have any claim beyond gratitude, you cannot repay it more effectually, and more agreeably to my mind, than by acting in such a way as to make people talk of you by and by as an industrious, steady, and I am sure they will add, clever and successful man.'

Jack's manly face glowed, and his brown eyes glistened at this encouraging statement; but he refrained from further speech until they reached the broad arterial thoroughfare which, from all the great western and southern provinces, leads into the most beautiful city in Australia.

'This looks something like a crowd, sir. What a mob of houses, people, cabs, teams, men, women, and children! What in the name of fortune do they all do, and where do they all go at night? Well, I never thought the town was as big as this. Confound the horse' (this to Ben Bolt, who lashed out at a passing hansom), 'he'll kill some one yet before he's safe in the stable.'

Perhaps a city is never seen to such advantage as after a considerable sojourn in the provinces, at sea, or in any such other distant or isolated abode, where the dweller is necessarily debarred from the required licenses of civilisation. At such a time the sensations, keenly sharpened by abstinence, do more than justice to the real, even to the apparent, advantages of that aggregation of human atoms known as a city.

The returning or arriving traveller revels in the real and supposititious treasures of this newly-discovered fairyland. The predominance and accessibility of wonders, the daily presence of friends, acquaintances, strangers, and notables, dazzle and deceive the eye long accustomed to the rare presentment of such personages; the public buildings, the parks, the intellectual and artistic treasure houses, the higher standard of appearance, dress—all combine to excite and animate the mind.

Mr. Neuchamp had been familiar with divers capitals of considerably greater pretensions, and of world-wide historic rank and reputation. London had been his home, Paris his

holiday retreat ; Rome, Venice, Vienna, his occasional residence. But he thought he had never before felt so high and genuine a degree of exhilaration when returning to any of those great cities after an absence, as he now acknowledged in every vein and pulse, as he rode up the not particularly gorgeous avenue of Brickfield Hill, and passing the railway station, decided to thread George Street and, depositing the horses at a snug stable he knew of, find his way once more to the office of Paul Frankston and Co.

It would be unjust to Mr. Neuchamp to say that this name and its concomitant associations had not been many times unquestioned and sole possessors of his thoughts. Many a time and oft had he wondered whether the household remained exactly *in statu quo*. Did the old man return nightly to his dinner, his cigar, his seat in the verandah, and his unfailing request to Antonia to play and sing? He could fancy her pleasant smile as she sat down to the instrument, and her cheerful performance of the somewhat old-fashioned tunes and melodies that her father loved.

And had she made any fresh acquaintances? Were any other newly-arrived colonists kindly greeted and put upon terms of familiar hospitality like himself? That sort of thing might be carried too far. Extremely entertaining young fellows emigrated, and a few that he could name were unmistakably 'bad eggs.'

However, he would very soon see if anything of the kind, any shadow of the falcon, was imminent. He had heard from time to time from old Paul, who occasionally furnished a message from Antonia of a new book she had been reading, a visit she had paid, a sailing excursion that she and her father had enjoyed together ; and lastly, something had been said about an Austrian nobleman—Count or Baron, or of some such objectionable rank—who was the acknowledged lion of Sydney just then, and who had been several times at Morahmee.

This piece of information did not cause any of the pleasure almost visible on the letter relating it to be conveyed to Ernest Neuchamp. 'Count be hanged!' he was English enough to say. 'I hate these foreign fellows. Ten to one there's something not quite correct about a foreigner on his travels. Not that there's any logical necessity for it. I trust I am not sufficiently insular to deny a foreign nobility all the graces and virtues that add lustre to our own. But we can always find out and trace our "heavy gunners." But in the countless (I mean no harm) multitude of Counts and Barons, Grafs and Vons, who can possibly tell whether the bowing, broken-Englised, insinuating beggar that you introduce to your wife and daughters is Von Adelberg himself, or his valet or courier levanted with the cash and purloining the title as well as the clothes of his master?'

Osmund and Ben Bolt were safely bestowed in a snug but

unpretending stable not a hundred miles from Bent Street, and Mr. Windsor, as a man who 'knew his way about,' even in a strange city, was left temporarily to his own guidance, merely being requested to report himself at Morahmee.

Every Englishman knows what important step Ernest took next. His hair reduced to the smallest visible quantity, and the luxuriance of his beard, which he had lately permitted full liberty of growth, rationally restricted, he betook himself to the well-known counting-house.

The grave head clerk, who had acquired such solemn doubts as to Mr. Hartley Selmore's final destination, smiled, under protest, when he announced 'a gentleman on business,' by Ernest's request. Old Paul looked up with his usual good-natured expression, then stared in unrecognising blankness at the bronzed and bearded figure before him, finally to burst into a perfect tempest of laughter and chuckling, shaking Ernest's hands violently with both of his, and making as if he could throw himself on the neck of his safe returning protégé.

'Ha! ha! ha! so you're back again, are you, Ernest, my boy? By Jove, I'm glad to see you; burnt brown enough too—shows you've been working; like to see it—none the worse looking for it, either, I know the girls will say. But, I say—ha! ha! ha! known by the police, eh? Captain Jinks alias Gentleman Jack and the *other prisoner*, eh, my boy? How I roared at that till Antonia was quite savage—for *her* you know. Didn't take your photo, did they? generally do, you know. Got an album, for reference, at all the chief police stations. You're coming out, of course, to-night. Antonia will be awfully glad; don't tell her I said so.

'Look here, my dear boy, I was just bothering this old head of mine about some business matters—hang them. You run away out to Morahmee, and tell Antonia to have dinner ready to the minute, or I'll murder the whole household. Now off with you!'

Ernest departed, nothing loath, and as he whirled out, hansom-borne, along the well-remembered road, and gazed once more upon the blue waters, the frowning headland, the green villa-dotted shores of the unequalled harbour, he mentally contrasted these with the gray monotonous plains of Garrandilla, or the equally monotonous waterless woodlands.

'By Jove!' he said, 'I feel like a schoolboy home for the holidays, or a sailor back from a cruise; and all for the pleasure of returning to Sydney, a place I had scarcely heard of a couple of years since. Am I the same Ernest Neuchamp that knew Paris pretty well before he was of age, and Vienna to boot?

'However, all this sort of thing is like your club dinners. The menu goes for little except you have the appetite; if you have *that*, you can renovate soul and body upon bread and cheese.' Here he deserted the region of philosophic parallels,

and began to picture the expression of satisfaction, perhaps of unrestrained pleasure, that would illumine Antonia Frankston's countenance upon his arrival. 'What a charming thing a perfect friendship between two persons of different sexes might be made!' he thought, 'if people would not insist upon complicating the highest, noblest, and most exalted sentiment of which our nature is capable with that ridiculous, half instinctive, undignified, inferior passion which men call love. Of course inferior. Why, friendship must necessarily be based upon an equality of culture, of social aims, principles, and sympathies, while the other violent, unreasoning, and unreasonable monopoly may exist between persons of the most widely differing ages, positions, standards of refinement, and intellectual rank; between the dotard and the maiden, the duke and the dairymaid, the peeress and the parvenu, the rustic and the courtier, the spotless pure, the incorrigibly base.'

From this it may be gathered that Mr. Neuchamp was not a man addicted to falling violently and promiscuously in love. In point of fact, he had a stupendously high ideal, which, not expecting to realise it in everyday life, seemed to keep the subject a good deal out of his mind. Then he thought a man should do some work under the sun first, and set about a quest for the 'sangreal' afterwards. He regarded Antonia Frankston with a deep feeling of interest, as a dear and highly sympathetic friend. He had given her the advantage of many criticisms with respect to the course of reading, very unusual for a girl of her age, that she was pursuing when they first met, and since then had advised and directed her intellectual progress.

Insensibly the natural sympathy between the master and a promising pupil was quickened and intensified by the originality of mind which Antonia evinced. When Ernest Neuchamp magnanimously departed for the interior, he had commenced to notice the awakening of an unacknowledged feeling that the hour's talk and make-believe school at Morahmee was the period of the day he was most eager to seize, most unwilling to relinquish.

And now how altered and strengthened as to her intellectual grasp must she be—this unsophisticated, unwon child of the fair south—with the brooding fancies and absolute simplicity of a child, the instinctive dignity, the curious aplomb, of a woman. As he reached this not unpleasing stage of his reverie the wheels of the hansom ground viciously the matchless gravel of the drive at Morahmee, and grazed perilously close the snowy sandstone steps in front of the portico.

Ernest recalled the old delicious sense of stillness, the

beautiful silence all around
Save wood-bird to wood-bird calling,

broken only by the calmly murmurous rhythmic plash of the wavelets on the beach.

It was not a house where people were always coming and going, and he did not remember often to have found Antonia otherwise than alone, on the occasion of his former visit. What was she doing now? Should he find her reading in the library, that pleasant room with the bay window, in which slumberous calms the smiles and storms of ocean were pictures set as in a frame? in the drawing-room? in the shrubbery? in the rose garden? in the morning-room, which she usually affected, and which, having a davenport, her favourite authors, and a cottage piano, was able to supply, indifferent well, the distinguishing features of three more pretentious apartments?

As he passed through the hall the notes of the piano, not of the boudoir, but the grand Erard, with a bass of organ-like depth of vibration, informed him that in the drawing-room he would probably find the youthful *châtelaine*.

Almost simultaneously he heard the rich, deep notes of a strange male voice accompanying the instrument, and recognised the concluding words of a duet which he himself had sung with Miss Frankston full many a time and oft.

As the second performer dwelt with perhaps unnecessarily tender expression upon Heine's thrilling 'Bis in den tiefsten Traum,' Mr. Neuchamp became conscious of a distinct change of feeling—of a sudden painful sense of disenchantment.

There was no tangible cause for uneasiness. A young lady was merely singing one of Mendelssohn's loveliest duets with an accredited musical acquaintance. By the merest accident, no doubt. Still, let but a single cloud darken the summer sky, the chill breeze once sigh, how faintly soever and the heart, that sensitive plant, shrinks instinctively at nature's warning. So smote the melody, albeit effectively rendered, upon Ernest's highly-wrought mind with a savour of bode and of dread. And as he entered the open door of the apartment he knew himself to be deeply changed from the eager visitor who had but a few moments since so joyously alighted at the portals of Morahmee.

CHAPTER XIV

THE attainment of pure and permanent happiness, by either of the attached persons, has always been held to be a leading aim of true friendship. Mild surprise at the nature of the implements chosen for such attainment is, perhaps, admissible. But no selfish disapproval can be justified for a moment, if only the appreciative partner elects to adhere fixedly to the new plan or newer friend.

Still, human nature is ever more philosophical in theory than in practice; and the wayfaring Damon, *de retour*, rarely reaches that pinnacle of sublime abnegation which glories in being superseded, or expresses gratitude that Pythias has provided himself with another Damon, 'whose Christian name was John.' Some natural distrust must ever be felt, must be exhibited, let the fresher friend be in the highest degree justifiable, heroic, adorable.

All the essayists on friendship notwithstanding, Mr. Neuchamp felt distinctly aggrieved. There was he, rushing back upon the wings of—well—intelligent and sympathetic friendship, willing to resume the delightful æsthetic intercourse which compulsory absence had alone interrupted, and now, apparently, he needed not to have come at all. Antonia was fully occupied, no doubt interested, by the first frivolous foreigner that came in her way, and was singing duets and so on, as if she had no higher aspiration than to listen for ever to a German band.

Entering the drawing-room, Ernest presented himself just as the Count (of course it was the Count, confound him!) was singing the *dich der folgen* portion of the melody with, as Ernest thought, ridiculously exaggerated emphasis. He made the most of his eyes—which were really fine—rolled them in an excess of admiration, and throwing the fullest expressive force into the concluding stanza, sighed and bowed low with admiring respect to the fair pianist. She smiled, not wholly with displeasure, and as she turned she met the somewhat grave and fixed regard of Ernest Neuchamp.

'Pray excuse me for disturbing your musical entertainment,

Miss Frankston,' he said, with a coldness unlike anything she had ever observed in his manner before.

Antonia's colourless face, which had flushed slightly at the suddenness of the *contretemps*, regained its habitual serene delicacy of hue, as she calmly observed—

'The Count von Schätterheims and I have been practising German duets for a *matinée* that Mrs. Folleton gives next week, and that all Sydney is wild about. It is quite a treat to have the aid of one who understands the genius of the poetry and music so thoroughly. Permit me to introduce you to the Count, Mr. Neuchamp.'

The foreign nobleman, a tall, fair man, with a moustache like a Pandour, bowed graciously, and resumed the musical subject.

'Ah! I did know Mendelssohn so well as mine fader. He lif at our house when he come to München. He always say I was born for a *maestro*.'

'And why did you not fulfil his prediction, Count?' asked Antonia, much interested.

'De sword,' said Von Schätterheims with a grave, sad air. 'You vill comprehend, he vas too moosh for de lyre. I join de movement of freedom. I haf commant, wit poor Körner. He die in dese arms.'

'The lyre—ahem!' said Ernest, smiling grimly at his utterly unjustifiable *mot*, 'has reasserted his right, I should say. Did not Körner die in 18—?' (Here he quoted the memorable 'Sword Song' in the original.)

'Ha!' said the Count, a new expression, not only of satisfaction, pervading his features, 'thou hast seen the Faderland. No Engländer ever learned a so *heimlich* accend who drank not in youth the beer at Studenten-Kneipe—we must have Brüderschaft. Is it not so?'

'Do you think we can manage "Die Schwalben," Count?' asked Antonia.

'But I haf bromiss to be at the house of Madame Folleton, to hear mademoiselle bractise dat leedle Folkslied. Besites, we read Heine togeder. She is aisthetig—yaas—to de tips of her finkers. Adieu!'

'And now, Mr. Ernest Neuchamp, what have you to say for yourself?' said Antonia, in a tone between jest and earnest, 'in that you have been in my presence for half an hour and have only smiled twice, have called me Miss Frankston, and have looked at that delightful creature, the Count, with an air of stern disapproval? Where do you expect to go to?'

'Really,' said Ernest, 'I am unconscious of having done or looked anything peculiarly unsatisfactory. But I thought you were so exceedingly well contented with the Count's society that I doubted whether I was not making an undesirable third. And who is this Count?'

'Well, he had letters to papa and old Captain Blockstrop ;

and all Sydney is wild about him. No party is worth going to where he does not come. He is the most accomplished and charming person—plays, sings, paints, has been a soldier and desperately wounded. All the young ladies of Sydney are wild about him. He is enormously rich, and gives such parties on board his yacht !’

‘And is Miss Frankston one of the young ladies whom this broken-Englished invincible has conquered?’ asked Ernest. ‘May I be permitted to congratulate her?’

‘You must judge for yourself,’ said the girl, with so merry a look and such a genuinely amused expression, that Mr. Neuchamp’s slight experience of the ways of womankind assured him that no great damage to his pupil’s heart had as yet taken place. ‘But there is just time for a stroll on the beach before dinner, and a slight sketch of your adventures since you left us. You look quite a bushman now. How sunburned you have managed to get !’

Mr. Neuchamp was but mortal. The best of us, under certain conditions, are weak. As Antonia shut down the piano and ran to get her straw hat with girlish freedom of manner, he felt his justifiable wrath evaporating. Long before they had finished that pleasant ramble in the cool twilight, with the stars one by one appearing, the surge voices whispering low and solemnly kind, the cool briny savour of the ocean—a sea of enchantment to Ernest, but of yesterday from the inner deserts—long before the somewhat emphasised dinner-bell rang, Ernest repented of his pettishness. He knew that his friendship had suffered neither wrong nor change. He felt that there were still feelings and aspirations in that fresh, unspoiled, girlish heart to which he alone had the password. He answered Mr. Frankston’s boisterous hail from the verandah in a surprisingly nautical and cheery manner, and passed in to the enjoyment of dinner and dinner talk, much relieved in mind.

‘What’s become of the Count, Antonia?’ said the old gentleman. ‘Try that Chablis, Ernest, my boy; imported it since you were down. Old Jedwood didn’t give you anything like that; thundering old screw, isn’t he? good man for all that; trust him with your life. I thought you were going to make the Count stay to dinner, Antonia.’

‘Well, it would have been pleasanter for Mr. Neuchamp, perhaps,’ said the young lady demurely. ‘But he said he had to go to Mrs. Folleton’s.’

‘Oh! that was the attraction then,’ said Mr. Frankston. ‘They say he admires Harriet Folleton tremendously. She will have twenty thousand down; but as he is so wealthy himself, of course the cash can’t matter.’

‘You all seem to take it for granted that he is so very rich, and a wonderful fellow in all respects,’ said Ernest. ‘He’s good-looking enough, I admit; but who is to know whether he is really the man he represents himself to be?’

'Why should he not be himself,' said Antonia, 'more than any one else?'

'For this reason,' replied Ernest, 'that it is much more easy for a foreigner to impose upon English people, in a community like this, than for an Englishman to practise a similar deceit. He has but to bring manufactured introductions, and the whole difficulty is over to a man of ordinary address and qualifications for sustaining such a part.'

'Well, I must say,' said Mr. Frankston, 'that the letters I received might have been written by any corresponding clerk in a German counting-house. I took him and his letters for granted, and so did old Blockstrop, just as we should have taken his bills properly endorsed. But let me ask you, Ernest, my boy, doesn't he look and speak like the real thing?'

'You must not be offended with me,' said Ernest, conscious of a certain flash in Antonia's eyes, 'or think me ungenerous, if I say that I should like to take a little more time and have some opportunities of intercourse before giving my opinion. You must remember that habitudes of ceremonious behaviour pervade *all classes* in continental countries to an extent unknown in British communities. By superficial observers a count and a courier, for instance, will not be perceived to differ in manner or language; and the courier is often the more picturesque personage of the two.'

'And why not?' inquired Antonia; 'is there *no* difference between the manners and the conversation of people of upper and lower rank, except in England and English places?'

'I do not say that; the contrary is the case, but the discrepancies are sufficiently minute to escape British people not thoroughly acquainted with the language. For the same reason no foreigner would discover the difference between a good-looking, decently-educated Britisher who dropped his aitches, and the real article. Thackeray somewhere gives a case in point.'

'Well, I suppose we shall be all at the great ball next week,' said Antonia, 'and you will then be able to analyse Count von Schätterheims to your heart's content. They say he admires Harriet Folleton extremely.'

'It's nothing to me whom he admires,' said Ernest, 'as long as he leaves a certain independent-minded young lady friend of mine alone. I should not like to see her carried off by any privateer hoisting false colours.'

'You are all jealous, that's the truth, if you would but own it,' laughed Antonia; 'and indeed, if one thinks of the commotion the Count has created among the Sydney young ladies, it seems reasonable enough. If he had been a whole man-of-war compressed, he could not have been more flattered and run after. And that is saying a great deal *here*, you know.'

'I am aware of that,' said Ernest, with a slight bow; 'short as has been my experience I have noticed so much.'

'Well, I agree with Ernest to a certain extent,' said old Paul reflectively. 'It's as well to be cautious with these wonderful strangers, especially foreigners. We haven't quite forgotten Senor Miranda yet, eh, Antonia?'

'Yes, I did see him once, if that's what you mean,' said the girl, looking at Ernest; 'and I have always been very sorry that he should have come to shame. He was a bad man, of course; but he was really so very grand-looking, and when he spoke he had such a sweet, grave, deep voice that you would have done whatever he asked you at once.'

'What did he do, then?' inquired Ernest.

'Do?' said Mr. Frankston. 'Why, with forged letters of introduction he commenced a business transaction with one of the banks; he placed to his credit a large balance, which he took care to draw out; and the end of it was that he walked off with five-and-twenty thousand pounds in exchange for bills not worth *that*, and has never been seen or heard of since.'

'How many Germans are there?' asked Antonia innocently.

'Forty odd millions,' answered Ernest.

'And there are twenty-two millions of Spaniards,' continued she, 'for I saw it to-day. Well, that makes so many—sixty millions, or more, altogether. And we are to suspect and distrust all these people, just because Senor Miranda was a swindler. I wonder if foreign nations are equally just to Englishmen on their travels.'

'Come along and let us have our cigars,' said the old gentleman. 'Antonia, we must get you made Austrian consul. What—you haven't learned to smoke in the bush, Ernest? Never mind; come along all the same. Cigars have more flavour in company, and the music will sound better too.'

It was a superb night—one of the units of that wondrous wealth and prodigality of perfect weather by which we should set greater store were we compelled to undergo a quarter of the austerity of northern Europe. Not a cloud was visible. The large and lustrous stars glowed all unheeded by an accustomed world. All the intricacies of the harbour seemed stretched and illumined by the glowing lights from the various vessels outward, homeward bound, or at anchor. And yet all invisible as was the sea, the presence of the majesty of the deep was manifest in the salt savour of the air, in the half-heard murmur of the tide ripples, in the far indistinctly wondrous tones of the surge upon the distant beach.

As the old man lit his cigar and looked seaward, mechanically, the first notes of a brilliant aria floated out upon the air from the piano, and Ernest musingly realised the unostentatious luxury of the household, the exquisite beauty of the scene and surroundings, and contrasted them with the rude adjuncts of Garrandilla and its environs.

Next morning Mr. Windsor made his appearance immediately after breakfast at Morahmee, and awaited commands.

'What a pretty horse!' said Antonia; 'is that yours?'

'That is Osmund, my first Australian hackney, and a great favourite,' said Mr. Neuchamp, with a certain pride.

'Well, you've done credit to your knowledge of horse-flesh,' said the old gentleman; 'he would fetch fifty pounds now in Sydney. And what about my countryman who is on his back? I can tell his parish without twice looking. He's like the horse, a good-looking, upstanding young one; but we can't be so sure about *his* value from appearance only.'

'Jack Windsor is mine, too,' said Ernest, 'a good, clever fellow, I think. It's rather a long story how we first became acquainted. I'll tell it you some day. When I buy a run he will go with me as stockman and right-hand man generally.'

'So that's the arrangement. I hope he will turn out a credit to you, like the horse. He's the cut of a good man, and I should have been very glad to have shipped him in old days for a whaling cruise. You will have to exercise your horse, now you have him stabled. Antonia would like a canter, I daresay.'

'I should, of all things,' said that young lady. 'My poor Waratah has not been out for a week; she looks ready to fly over the moon with nervousness. We might go this afternoon, if Mr. Neuchamp can spare the time.'

Mr. Neuchamp declared that all his time was spare time now, and that he should be charmed to be at Antonia's disposal for any and every afternoon as long as he remained in town.

So Jack and the gray horse were sent back to their stable, with orders to return at three o'clock punctually.

'And after the ball,' said Mr. Frankston, 'I shall take a holiday, so I think we'll have a sail and do a little fishing. At any rate we shall see the harbour, and I can show you something choice in the way of bays. How do you like the idea?'

Both of the young people protested that it was the exact thing they had been longing for for months. And so, that arrangement being settled, the old gentleman departed for town in his dog-cart, and Ernest, having a few things to do bordering upon business, accompanied him.

One of the minor perplexities which assail the student of human nature arises from the fact that all, or nearly all, of the persons who arrive in a colony conduct themselves after the same fashion. For a season, which includes the first few months, they are wildly capricious, and even reckless, in the matter of raiment. The idea is always uppermost that, in a new country, it is not of the slightest consequence how anybody dresses; that to no one, the newly-landed in particular, can it possibly matter whether his fellow-mortals array themselves in broad-cloth or sackcloth, tweed or canvas, spotless linen or red shirt.

Another strongly implanted idea is, that the subdivisions of society, set up by colonists among themselves, are vain, weak, and unnecessary. These severely linear distinctions are adhered to in the old country, and are *there*, doubtless, right and

expedient. But, ye gods ! in this land, inhabited by the wandering savage but of yesterday, by the confused crowd of hard and anxious colonists (all colonists are necessarily rough and uncereemonious), why revive these absurd, exaggerated, old-world ceremonies ?

Thus, during his little day of nonage, the emigrant Briton disports himself, rejoicing in his newly-found emancipation from conventionalities. He goes to a dinner party in a morning suit, and finds himself the sole person not in evening dress. He pays visits in a pilot's jacket, and feels a thrill of pride and defiance as he observes the young ladies of the house look wonderingly at him. He bears himself as he would not dream of doing in his own country town, perhaps a more primitive and deplorably dull neighbourhood than he could easily find in the older districts of Australia. And for all this refusal to pay the simple compliment of conformity to the kindly people among whom he is entertained and made welcome, he has no better reason to give himself or others than that it is a colony, and that it would be absurd to expect the same social observances as in an old country.

Nothing could be more amiable than the general toleration which obtains of this youthful eccentricity, were it not so thoroughly understood that it is the ordinary early phase of griffinhood, and that it is certain to wear out in time. It would be mortifying to the pride of the contemner of social customs, could he but fully understand how every one, from the mild uncritical senior to little miss in her teens, holds these clothes-philosophical eccentricities in good-humoured contempt, and relies upon the wearer becoming like everybody else, in a year or two at farthest.

We know that much of this spirit possessed the aspiring soul of Ernest Neuchamp, when first he stood upon the balcony of the Royal Hotel and gazed upon the crowd that passed below. But though he had abated not a jot of some points of his original charter, he yet could not but acknowledge that he was a very different individual, in opinion and in feeling, from the ardent emigrant of only a year ago.

As one consequence of this altered tone of mind, he cheerfully accepted Mr. Frankston's offer of arranging his admission as honorary member of one of the clubs. He began to feel a longing for the society of his equals ; and, as he could not be always lounging away the day at Morahmee, and did not contemplate an immediate return to Garrandilla, he saw the necessity of having some recognised place of temporary abode wherein he might take his ease, in the society of gentlemen, and keep himself *au courant* with the progress of the world.

This transaction having been formally carried out by the ever-zealous and kindly Paul, he was placed in receipt of a missive, signed by the secretary, and announcing that he had been elected to be an honorary member of the New Holland Club.

He was introduced next day by Mr. Frankston himself, and discovered that he had the *entrée* to a handsome commodious building, with a larger extent of lawn and shrubbery than he had ever seen attached to an institution of the nature before. The internal arrangements were familiar, being precisely the same as those of the London Club, to which he had been elected about five years after nomination.

There were the same grave, decorous servants, the same silent appreciation of the same style of highly respectable cookery, the same comfortable sitting-room, with—oh, pleasant sight!—good store of magazines, *Punches*, *Saturdays*, *Pall Malls*, and all the priceless luxuries of refined, if ephemeral, journalism. There was the same deserted library, the same populous smoking-room, with billiard-room ditto. To a few members old Paul had introduced him, and for the rest he was aware that he must take his chance.

He found, after a day or two, that he had small reason to fear of isolation. A gentlemanlike stranger needs but the evidence of this quality to procure friendly acquaintances, if not intimates, at any club.

He was soon known as ‘a young fellow who had been sent out to old Frankston, and was going to buy a station. A decent sort of fellow belonging to swell people, and so on. Going to do wonders, and make important changes. That will wear off—we’ve all passed through that mill. He’ll settle down and take to wool and tallow kindly, like all the rest of us, in good time.’

Mr. Neuchamp made the discovery that, if he had been less obstinately bent upon separating himself from the presumably prejudiced society of the new land, in the fervour of his philanthropy, he might possibly have met with other colonists, who, like Paul Frankston, would have shielded him from harm, and proffered him good and true advice. In his new home he made the acquaintance of more than one silver-haired pioneer, who, while gently parrying the thrusts of his eager and somewhat communistic theories, quietly put forward the dictates of long experience and successful practice. Every one was disposed to be tolerant, agreeable, even friendly to the frank youngster, who was, in spite of his crotchets, evidently ‘good form.’ And Ernest realised fully, and rather unexpectedly, that even in a colony it is possible for a stranger to fall among friends, and that colonists are not invariably all stamped out of one pattern, whatever anticipations may be compounded in the fancy of the emigrating critic.

In another respect, Ernest found that his club privileges were valuable as well as luxurious. Among the squatters, who composed the larger proportion of the members, he had the advantage of hearing the question of pastoral property discussed with fullest clearness and explanation, in all its bearings. No one evaded giving a decided opinion upon the

chances of investment, though, according to temperament and other causes, the answers were various. All agreed, however, in one respect, namely, that stock had touched a point of depression, below which it seemed wellnigh impossible to fall. The great question, of course, was whether such properties would ever rise, or whether such profits or losses, as the case might be, must be accepted as permanently fixed.

'I believe that cattle and sheep never *will* rise a penny higher during our lifetime, particularly cattle,' said a slight, elegant, cynical squatter, with whom Ernest had made acquaintance. 'It's of course nothing but what any one ought to have expected in this infernal country. What is there to keep stock up, I ask? As for wool, South America will grow three bales to our one directly; and cattle and horses will be slaughtered for their hides, as they are there.'

'What a grumbler you are, Croker!' said a stout cheery-looking youngster, with a long fair moustache and a smooth face; 'you run down the country like a rival agent-general. Why do you stay in it, if it's so bad?'

'I'd leave to-morrow if I could get any one fool enough to buy my runs; take my passage by the mail and never be heard of here again.'

'Well, you wouldn't make a bad immigration agent, if the Government wanted to appoint a prepossessing advertiser for Europe.'

'Agent! why, what do you see in me to make you think I should accept any such office?'

'Only, this strikes me, that if you went on talking there in your dissatisfied strain, the acute common people would be certain that you had some reason of your own for dissuading them from embarking, and, so thinking, would pour in by crowds.'

'Likely enough,' sneered the *avocat pour le diable*. 'There are only two sets of people in this rascally country—rogues and fools.'

'And to which division of society do I belong, may I ask?' inquired Ernest, rather amused at the uncompromising nature of the denunciation.

'Well, perhaps it's not very polite, but, as you wish for the information, I look upon you as a fool, for wishing to invest and waste your life here; upon Compton as another, because he thinks well of the place and people; and upon myself as the biggest one of the lot for staying here, when I know so well what lies before the whole rotten sham which calls itself a prosperous colony.'

'Are matters then so bad?' inquired Ernest, with some solicitude. 'I thought that the country was sound generally.'

Mr. Croker bestowed upon him a look of pity, mingled with contempt, and in his most acid tones replied—

'If you knew half as much as I do about the banks and mer-

cantile transactions, if you were a little behind the scenes as I have, perhaps unluckily, been, you would know that a crash must come—*must* come—within the next two or three years. I expect to see all the banks in the hands of official assignees—they'll be the only solvent people. As for the merchants—'

'Well, Mr. Jermyn Croker, "as for the merchants"?' said a jolly voice, and Paul Frankston's rubicund and reassuring countenance appeared in the little group which had gathered to listen to the lamentations of this latter-day seer—'how about the merchants?'

'Why,' returned Mr. Croker, totally unabashed, 'I expect to see you, and Holder Brothers, and Deloraine and Company, and the rest, begging in the streets.'

'Ha! ha! ha! capital. Well done, Jermyn; put a half-crown or two in your pocket against that day; I know you'd like to relieve honest poverty. In the meantime come and dine with me on Thursday, will you, and Compton, and Neuchamp? Better come soon, you know, while that Roederer holds out. "Let us eat and drink," you know, etc. I say, what will you take for that cattle station of yours at Lake Wondah? No use holding, you know, eh?'

'Two pounds a head, for three thousand—calves given in.'

'What dates?'

'Cash down! Do you think I'd take any man's bills now? No, not if Levison himself were to endorse.'

'Hem—ha—I learn the cattle are baddish, but the run is understocked. How long will you leave it open?'

'Oh! a month; three months if you like. Send me a cheque at any time for six thousand and I will send you an order to take possession; that is, as soon as I find the cheque all right.'

'Ha! ha! not bad, Croker. It would be the first cheque of Paul Frankston's that ever was unpaid, so far. But you'll not forget Thursday, all of you, boys. We must try and shake Croker out of the blues, or he'll ruin the prospects of every squatter in New South Wales.'

Mr. Neuchamp's spirits were not so permanently affected by the alarming vaticinations of Mr. Jermyn Croker, as that he was prevented from exhibiting Osmund's figure and paces past the club verandah that afternoon, followed by Mr. Windsor on Ben Bolt, on his way to keep tryst with Antonia.

There may be a pleasanter species of locomotion, on a fine day, than that afforded by a good horse in top condition over a smooth road, in the immediate vicinity of a valued lady friend; let us say there may be, but we have yet to discover it. The yacht, sweeping like a seamew over the rippling, gaily-breaking billow, with courses free and a merry company aboard, holds high excitement and joyous freedom from the world's cankering cares; the mail Phaeton with a pair of well-bred steppers, or, better still, a high drag behind a fresh team, well matched and

better-mouthed, has its own peculiar fascination as one is whirled through the summer air, or borne fast and free through the gathering twilight homewards and dinnerwards; even the smooth, irresponsible rush of the express train yields not wholly disagreeable sensation of a victory over time and space, as we whirl adown the flying grades and round the somewhat *risque* curves. But the personal element which the rider shares with the bonny brown, or gallant grey, that strides with joyous elasticity beneath him, had a thrill, in the 'brave old days of pleasure and pain,' that dwarfed all other recreation. If anything can intensify the feeling of joyance, it is the presence, similarly equipped, of the possible princess. Then the fairy glamour is complete—in the forest glades are the leaflets hung with diamonds, the half-heard music is full of unearthly cadences—and as the graceful form sways with movement of her eager palfrey, the good knight's head must be harder than his casque if heart and sword and fame, past, present, and to come, be not laid, then and there, at the feet of that ladyefayre.

Miss Frankston rode, like most Australian girls, extremely well, and with an unconscious grace and security of seat only to be attained by those who, like her, had enjoyed the fullest opportunities of practice from earliest childhood. Her dark bay mare was thoroughbred, having been carried off by Mr. Frankston five minutes after she lost her first race at Randwick. She had been indifferently brought out, and, as a sporting friend said, was not fit to run for a saddle in a shearers' sweepstakes.

Antonia had taken a strong fancy to her personal appearance, and Paul, as usual, had then and there gratified his pet. Waratah, which was the filly's name, proving after trial high-couraged and temperate, had been installed at Morahmee as the description of dumb favourite for which, in the springtime of life, the heart of a woman is prone to crave.

On this particular afternoon it was proposed by Antonia that they should ride to Bondi. 'One of our show places, you must know,' she said; 'and as the wind is coming in strong from the south, we shall have the surf-thunder in perfection.'

'Don't ride *into* the breakers, that's all, as you tried to do last time we were there; if you and Waratah were carried off your feet, your poor old father would never see his pet again.'

'How do you know? You silly old papa. Can't we both swim?' said the girl, laying her hand tenderly on his weather-beaten cheek; 'you will make Mr. Neuchamp think that I'm as wild as a hawk, instead of being the sober-minded damsel that I really am. However, you need not be afraid of my running any foolish risks to-day.'

The morning had been clear, with that suspicion of chill which told that at no great distance from the coast there had been a strong change of temperature. In and around Sydney the atmospheric tendency had been softened into a composite

of warmth, tempered with freshness wonderful to experience and exhilarating past all description.

The girl slackened the rein of her eager mare, and the excited horses swept along the smooth, winding, dark-red road. Before them lay the dark blue plain of ocean, fading into a misty, troubled haze which met the far horizon. Gradually they increased their distance from the gay gardens and villas of the more populous suburbs, the spires and terraces of the city.

'This has always been a favourite excursion of mine,' said Antonia. 'From the moment we pass Waverley and front the ocean in all his wondrous strength and beauty, I feel as if I could shout for joy. Morahmee is very pretty, but the harbour has always a kind of lakelike prettiness to me; like the beds in a flower garden, while here——'

'And here?' said Ernest, smiling, as the southern maiden fixed her earnest gaze upon the wide glory of the unbounded sea, with a passion and tenderness of regard which he had never observed before.

'Here,' said she, 'I feel lifted from my daily small pleasures and *very* minute cares into a world of thought and vision, exalted, infinite in grandeur and richness of colouring. My mind travels across that region of mystery and wonder which the sea has ever been to adventurous and practical minds, and all my heroes stand visibly presented before me.'

'Please to introduce me,' said Ernest.

'I see Walter Raleigh, courtier, poet, warrior, sailor, statesman, and can mourn over him, as though I had seen that noblest of heads upon the cruel block but yesterday. I see Francis Drake with his crisp curls and dauntless spirit; I see Columbus ever calm, watchful, indomitable; Ponce de Leon, pacing up and down his lonely beach at Hispaniola, and can fancy him setting forth upon his half-melancholy, half-ludicrous expedition to *la fontain de jouvences*; even Bimini—oh! the many, many friends and companions that have ever been associated with the sea in my mind since my earliest childhood.'

'I am afraid,' said Ernest, translating an unacknowledged thought, 'that you must be something like a cocoa-palm, or your own Norfolk Island pine, unable to exist out of hearing of the sound of the sea.'

'I never thought about that,' answered the girl with a half-curious look, 'is it back from the unreal world. 'I have always fancied that I would do whatever other people would do. But we all have our pet fancies, which we spoil like children, or which spoil us, and the prosaic part of our life has to go on notwithstanding.'

'Have you ever seen anything of the bush?' inquired Ernest.

'Nothing more than a very hasty visit to one or two of the inland towns. I have always wished to go to a real station and see something of bush life, but papa never could spare me

sufficiently long. What is it like? All riding about, from morning to night, and being very sleepy in the evening?’

‘There is a good deal of that,’ said he, ‘but not quite so much as might be thought. There is a great want of books, and of the habit of reading, in many places, though I know of course that it is not universal. But I think when I have a place of my own that I can manage to unite work and play, real exertion with an intellectual alternation, and this should be the perfection of existence.’

‘I don’t see why it could not be managed,’ said Antonia. ‘Many of the young squatters have told me that they could not get books, and that they were becoming frightfully ignorant; but I always said it must be their own fault. Any one who *must* read will read, no matter what their circumstances are.’

‘So I believe,’ answered Ernest, with most appreciative accents. ‘When young people, or people of any age, say they have not time to read, it sounds in my ears as if they said that they had not time to eat their dinners, or to bathe, or say their prayers, or to talk to their friends. For these duties and other distractions they generally find leisure, and if the time be really fully occupied, a quarter of an hour almost in converse with some authors would provide the mind with new and instructive thoughts for the whole livelong day.’

‘Well, we must see how Mr. Neuchamp carries out his ideas when he has a station of his own,’ said Antonia archly. ‘He must have everything very nice, very superior to the ordinary ways of colonists, and must make money also; *that* is indispensable.’

‘I will answer for his trying to have things pleasantly and perhaps artistically arranged,’ said Ernest, following out the sketch; ‘but as for the making money, I have so little interest in it as one of the fine arts, that I may fail in that.’

‘But that is the foundation of all the good deeds that you may do, so at least papa says. If a man doesn’t make money, I heard him say once, he shows all the world that there is some quality lacking in him, and any little that he can say or do will not have its just weight; he is regarded only as an unpractical, unsuccessful enthusiast.’

‘I hate the word enthusiast,’ said Mr. Neuchamp, ‘or rather the sense of disparagement in which it is generally used. It has come to mean, a man who is obstinately bent on a course of conduct which is wrong, or who exaggerates the degree or importance of his practice in what is right.’

‘I cannot say that I am particularly fond of the word or of the idea myself, woman as I am; and you know that we are supposed to be full of enthusiasm on every conceivable subject from parasols to politics.’

‘And why does Miss Frankston add her powerful influence to the world’s Philistinism, already sufficient for its needs?’ asked Ernest, with a slight tinge of satire.

‘I don’t say that I deny or distrust enthusiasm in men ; and I can imagine a sincere respect and liking for the individual to go with a distrust of the quality, and for this reason. We may have the greatest admiration for this lofty feeling and generous self-denial which go to compose the character of the enthusiast. But we may smile at the likelihood of any of his great schemes issuing in glory and success.’

‘But, surely,’ pleaded Ernest, ‘many of the great deeds which embellish history and which have ennobled our common natures have been nurtured in the brains, wrought out by the hands of men whom the world called enthusiasts.’

‘Of that fact I am not so sure,’ answered Antonia. ‘I should rather say that the successful heroes were men of steadfast nature, not particularly acted upon by joy or despondency, whom success did not exhilarate, nor adversity bow down ; through good and evil report, failure, or the harder trial of success, they bore themselves calmly and strongly.’

‘But how about the sea—and the mysterious intoxication communicated by its very appearance?’ asked Ernest mischievously. ‘Is there no enthusiasm about such a feeling?’

‘All those sensations,’ laughed the girl, ‘belong to the ideal Antonia Frankston, of which only a glimpse is permitted to any one from time to time. The real Miss Frankston—’

‘What does she do?’

‘Makes puddings, keeps the household accounts, orders dinner, and has distinct ideas on the subject of the main chance ; *very* prosaic this last. Is not that a lovely nook, and *such* a pretty house?’

At this turn of the subject, and the turn of the road, they had unexpectedly come upon a villa embosomed in an almost Alpine fir grove ; the trim lawns and delicately-coloured parterres, amid which it was placed, giving the whole place the appearance of a Watteau, framed in sombre green.

‘It is a living picture,’ said Ernest ; ‘how that wonderful Bougainvillea has draped the whole height of the north wing of the house ; it is in full and splendid bloom, and mingled with it are the snowy flowers of the delicate myosotis. How charmingly secluded it is ; they can look straight from their parlours across those dwarf-walls—across the Pacific Ocean. But where is the shepherdess?’

‘There she is ; do you not see that young girl sitting reading by the fountain? Calm and untroubled she looks ; she reclines upon the low terrace facing the sea ; by her side is a great vase filled with flowers. A child with a wide sash runs out from the house towards her. Can anything more closely realise a deep dream of peace?’

‘Nothing, indeed,’ assented Ernest admiringly. ‘I could live all my days in such a nook, with one fair spirit to be my minister, and perhaps defer finishing my own and other people’s education indefinitely.’

'Look !' continued Antonia, ignoring the personal element, 'with what a bold, sweeping curve the coast-line recedes ; leaving the loveliest little landlocked bay, with silver sands and a grand sandstone bluff guarding and walling-in the farther point like a grim jealous giant. But now we have such a piece of road, before we reach Bondi—smooth, soft, and slightly ascending. We *must* have a gentle breather.'

She took Waratah by the head, and slightly bending forward on her saddle, the eager thoroughbred went away at once, causing the heart of Mr. Neuchamp to palpitate with a nervous dread of accident. Of course Osmund followed suit, though it gave him quite enough to do to keep pace with the bounding, elastic stride of the well-bred flyer. In a three-mile race he could have run Waratah hard. However, for the half-mile spin it took a little hustling to prevent his being distanced. At the steep ascent of the hill above the far-famed beach, Antonia reined in her steed, which possessed the rare compromise, good temper with high courage.

'I suppose that our stupid scientific men will never find out any way for us to fly,' said she, 'but a good gallop must be as near the sensation as we can hope for. What a glorious feeling it is ! I envy men their hunting, perhaps more than any of their exclusive pastimes.'

'But ladies hunt, at any rate in England,' said Ernest, 'and very straight they go too.'

'So they do, I have been told ; but in Australia there are hardly enough of us to keep one another countenance ; and besides, papa does not like it ; the fences are so very dangerous.'

'All things considered, I agree with Mr. Frankston.'

'But what a view of views !'

They had now reached the crest of the hill, the deep-toned ceaseless roll of the surf-billows had long been in their ears.

'That is Bondi,' said Antonia, pointing southward. 'I have heard that sound at intervals all my life. I used to dream of it when I was a little child.'

Ernest looked southward over a rolling, rugged down, flecked with patches of low underwood and heath, to where a broad, milk-white beach received the vast rollers of a boundless ocean. No point or headland broke the continuous distance of the immense dark blue plain which stretched to the utmost boundary of vision.

It was no day of gale or tempest, but there had been sufficient wind on this and the previous day to set in motion the unrelenting surges which failed not the year through to moan and thunder upon this broad clear shining beach. Great crags lay to the westward, shutting off this bay from the other portions of the coast, while a projection to the eastward tended to isolate the bay of surges. Far out, from time to time a shining sail came from the under-world and swept placidly towards the city, or a stately ocean steamer, with throbbing screw or mighty paddle, left a

long line of smoke trailing behind her as she drove haughtily against wind or tide on her appointed course.

'How one drinks in all this grandeur and loveliness of Dame Nature,' said Ernest. 'An instinctive constitutional craving seems satiated only by gazing at a scene like this.'

'I fully comprehend the condition of mind,' said Antonia. 'You have been shut up at Garrandilla, where in time, except from information, you would begin to doubt the existence of the sea altogether.'

'It is an astonishing contrast,' assented Mr. Neuchamp. 'How awfully hot it must be there now. I daresay old Doubletides is just coming in, half melted after his day's work, looking for lost sheep—counting one flock, and ordering another to come in to-morrow.'

'Surely it must be a terrible life,' said Antonia apprehensively. 'Is that why people in the bush go mad sometimes?'

'It's hard to say. I really don't think he or Jedwood are even dull or distrait, or unduly impressed with the nothingness of existence. I think very energetic people have certain advantages. Their tuglike, unremitting habit of doing something keeps the machine going, until some fine day a cogwheel catches, or a rivet breaks, and one more human unit mingles its dust with the forgotten millions.'

'Contemplation is very nice,' said Antonia, 'but I think it tends to lower the spirits, whereas work of any kind, with or without a purpose, tends to raise them; and now we must ride for it, or we shall be late for dinner, which I know from experience does not tend to raise papa's spirits.'

The roads were perfect, and the kindly twilight as they swept past the fine plantations of Randwick, and adown the noble avenue which in the future will be one of the glories of Sydney, through the wide half-redeemed expanse of Moore Park, and so home by Woollahra, gave them every opportunity of lengthening their tête-à-tête, and yet arriving at Morahmee in time for dinner. It necessitated a hasty toilet on both sides, but at the last notes of the bell Antonia appeared, looking very fresh and animated after the expedition, and Ernest, whose appetite had not yet relapsed into metropolitan apathy, looked forward to dinner with feelings of almost youthful anticipation.

'Well, what do you think of Bondi?' asked the old gentleman. 'I was nearly drowned there when I was a youngster swimming in the surf. In fact I was drowned to all intents and purposes, except that I am here now. I was sucked back by the undertow time after time, till I was quite beaten. I had a few minutes' awful struggle; then collapse and half a minute's choke; then lovely music in my ears; and I left the world—as I thought—for good.'

'You dear old naughty boy of a father,' said Antonia, with tears half gathering to her eyes, 'I am sure you were bathing

unlawfully, like the boys in the story-book. But what restored you to life?’

‘Well, a Maori, who happened to come up at the time in a fishing boat. He could *swim*.’

‘But I thought you said that you were swimming in the surf and did your best to fight through it?’ inquired Ernest.

‘Maoris and Kanakas can *swim*,’ repeated the old man sarcastically. ‘White men like you and me can only paddle. Anyhow, he dived and brought me up, and ten minutes after I was suffering the frightful torture, “coming to.” So, as perhaps you may have guessed, I did not die that time.’

‘Oft in danger, yet alive,
We are come to, fifty-five,’

quoted Ernest. ‘I daresay you have had all sorts of hairbreadth escapes, if you would only tell them to us.’

‘Escapes! well, I have had a few,’ chuckled the old man. ‘Some day I must make Antonia write them out, and we’ll publish the *Surprising Adventures of Paul Frankston*. I wonder if I could put in some of my stories? Ha! ha! ha! How they would laugh.’

‘I think your life would make a capital book,’ said Antonia, ‘and you could afford to leave the stories out.’

‘Ha! well, I don’t know; some people might object; but I have seen some queer places and people, and had some very narrow squeaks. I was a ship boy in the *Lloyd* when the Maoris took her at the Bay of Islands.’

‘What did they do?’ asked Ernest.

‘Do? Only murdered every living soul except a little girl and myself! Old Parson Ramsden came down months after and ransomed us. He could go anywhere. That little girl is a grandmother now. I could show you such a splendid bit of tattooing just—Antonia, my dear, you needn’t be afraid.’

‘Don’t be foolish, papa,’ said Antonia, blushing. ‘Mr. Neuchamp, he is only joking.’

‘Joking,’ said the old man; ‘if you’d only had those patterns printed out slowly and indelibly, like me and Mrs. Lutton, poor thing, you’d have known it was no joke.’

‘Well, they didn’t eat you that time, at any rate,’ said Ernest, coming to the rescue; ‘a hero can’t be killed in the first volume; and what was the next narrow escape?’

‘Years afterwards I was cast away in the south seas, and came ashore on a spar at an island where they’d never heard of a white man. They had sacrifices and prayers and made a kind of lottery about whether they should eat me; when, as luck would have it, the chief had lost his eldest son a year before, and the priests said I was him come back. So I was turned into a Kanaka Prince of Wales.’

‘And was the rank properly kept up?’

‘Jolliest place I ever was in, before or since; I had been

starved and shipwrecked, and I tell you it was a pleasant change; I was the second man in the island. I had a palace, partly leaves, but cool and pleasant. I had thirty—well—hum—ha—more attendants than I knew what to do with. I cried, I know, when a Yankee whaler took me off six months after. But come, this won't do, Master Ernest, you mustn't keep me spinning sea-yarns all night about myself. You haven't half told us about your doings? Was Captain Jinks really a pleasant sort of fellow? And how about the lock-up?'

'Come, papa,' said Antonia, 'it's hardly fair to Mr. Neuchamp to laugh at him about that little mistake—any one might be taken in by a nice-looking, clever, plausible man.'

'Well, I confess,' said Ernest boldly, 'I *was* taken in, though I ought to have known better. If I had seen a seedy aristocrat in my own country, I should not have made a travelling companion of him. But he was very clever and good-looking, and I thought there was nothing wonderful in such a man being out of luck in a colony.'

'Never mind; fault on the right side,' said Mr. Frankston—'anything's better than being suspicious; you'll cut your wisdom teeth before you've done with us.'

CHAPTER XV

MR. NEUCHAMP was disposed to be wroth with himself when he discovered that he was looking forward with considerable interest to a much-talked-of ball, by which the Count von Schätterheims had resolved to mark his appreciation of the kindness which he had received at the hands of the Sydney 'upper ten.' Why should he feel gratified, Ernest asked himself, at the prospect of joining in an entertainment, at best but a *réchauffé* of numberless affairs of the class which he had assisted at and despised in England? A ball—a mere ball—a stale repetition of the meaningless crust—the saltatory, amatory, and gustatory simulacra of pleasure, which he had long since renounced and abandoned. An entertainment chiefly composed of people he didn't know, and given by a man whom he did not like.

He finally disposed of the affair in his own mind by the summary, if illogical, decision, that he must regard himself, in respect of his late banishment from the world, in the light of a sailor after a protracted cruise, gifted with abnormal powers of assimilation and digestion, mental and physical.

Even in moments of sternest self-analysis men are not infrequently insincere and evasive. Perchance not consciously. Were the moral processes incapable of such inflections, Ernest Neuchamp could never have concealed the fact from himself that he chiefly wished to attend this much-abused festivity, to which he had received a formal and ornate card, inclusive of the arms and crest of the noble family of Von Schätterheims, because it would be graced by the presence of Antonia Frankston.

Ernest did not find the very excellent dinner of which he partook at the club on the evening of the ball in any degree less palatable because of this mental conflict. He arrayed himself in the wampum and warpaint proper for such engagements as manufactured by Mr. Poole, of Saville Row, which decorations indeed had narrowly escaped being left behind as a superfluous part of his outfit at Neuchampstead. After a careful toilette he awaited in a slightly unphilosophical state of mind the

arrival of the Frankston carriage, which was to call for him.

Punctually at ten the highly effective bays contributed their particular quota of gravel-scratching to the enormous aggregate of road friction which pervaded Sydney on that night, and Mr. Neuchamp, placed opposite to a wrapped and draped cloud of diaphanous material, which he conjectured to be a young lady, and most probably Antonia, from the similarity of voice, was whirled off towards the gate of happiness. Before they could approach that enchanted portal they became sensible of a line of lamp-lit vehicles apparently several miles long, at the remote end of which they were compelled to await the gradual debouching of the leading files. The opportunity was favourable for conversation, and Miss Frankston having disengaged apparently so much of her envelope as permitted free egress to her words, they commenced—

‘What a lovely night? I was so afraid it would rain. I am sure it will be the most delightful ball we have ever had. I feel certain I shall enjoy myself immensely. It is ages since I have been to a dance.’

‘I hope your anticipations may be realised,’ quoth Ernest. ‘Captain Cook was here, I think, when I last went to one. I had ceased to think them rational amusements long before I left home.’

‘Oh! but then you are really dissipated in England, if what we hear of a London season be correct,’ said Antonia. ‘Two or three balls a night, and some engagement at least once every night. What girl could stand that? Now we poor colonists have perhaps two or three a month in our gayest time, and now and then, as now, one in half a year.’

‘Well, doubtless the degree of dissipation makes some difference,’ said Mr. Neuchamp, ‘and I do not mind owning that I feel as I used to feel; as Hood’s seamstress says, before I knew the words of “drums and matinées, crushes and staircase charges, with all the melancholy *melée* of supper, when nobody could eat if they had any appetite, or could have appetite if they would eat.”’

‘You are not in a very promising state of mind,’ said Antonia, ‘so I think I can provide you with plenty of real dancing, if you wish, plenty of nice partners, not anything dangerous in the way of crush, and if you take me in to supper, I will guarantee you something to eat.’

‘Well done,’ said Paul; ‘I’ll back you up in all you have said. Ernest will see no end of nice girls, who will dance him off his legs, unless he’s very fit indeed; I think the music isn’t bad, and Dettmann generally gives you something worth eating, and, more particularly, drinking. I’m the man to be pitied.’

‘Why, you naughty papa?’ said the veiled figure.

‘Because, just about this time, I ought to be smoking my

third cigar, and going peacefully to bed, whereby I should wake up with a clear head, a good appetite, and a strong idea that I was going to make some money before noon ; instead of which, to-morrow morning, most probably, I shall be slightly feverish, eat no breakfast, and have a general conviction that stock are going down, discounts rising, and the country going to the bad generally.'

'Not if you play whist steadily with old Mr. Howler, the Colonel, and Dr. Whyte ; get the Colonel for a partner, and you'll be sure to win.'

'That's all very well,' said the sacrificial parent, 'but five or six hours are not so easy to dispose of at sixty odd. I foresee that I shall eat and drink imprudently, catch cold, have a highly unpleasant next morning, with a hint of indigestion, bile, and lumbago.'

'How differently pleasure affects us, at sixteen and sixty,' observed Ernest with an air of solemn conviction.

'I call that very cruel,' said Antonia. 'I always want papa to let me go with Mrs. Evergreen, but he prefers to martyrise himself, like a dear old papa as he is.'

'Well, perhaps he likes to look at his little girl enjoying herself,' said old Paul. 'I can weather it out yet, perhaps better than I say. I was fond enough of fun myself, and have had some strange dances in strange places, with strange company. I remember once—'

'Come, papa !' said the veiled prophetess warningly.

'Well, only this one ; we shall soon be out. I was once down in New Zealand, in the old times, long enough ago, before the gold and the Government, and just as we went ashore at Motiki we heard that the principal Pakeha-Maori, an old sea-captain of course, was going to give a dance and a grand spread. We were wild for fun, of course ; been out thirteen months. Well, the old boy, a grizzled, hard-weather-looking old sea-dog, asked us all, captain, supercargo, and officers.'

'I daresay it was very characteristic,' said Ernest ; 'what were the ladies like ?'

'Well, a majority of the wives and daughters of the British settlers were Maoris. It was very rich land, and old Blackbeard had secured a considerable slice. He had a Maori wife, and ever so many daughters. The youngest was a great beauty, splendid eyes, such a figure, and so on ; I was quite a youngster, and bashful, so I said to the old skipper, "Please introduce me to your youngest daughter, Captain Blackbeard." The old pirate looked at me for a minute from under his grizzled eyebrows, and then growled out—"How do you suppose I introduced myself to her mother ? go and hail the craft yourself"—which I did, and I never wish—'

'Papa !' said Antonia, with great distinctness of intonation. 'Here we are at the step. Please go first, and you will give me room to extricate myself.'

Mr. Frankston delivered himself upon the carpet spread from hall to staircase with an adroitness which seemed a reminiscence of old seamanship, and following Miss Frankston and her father, Mr. Neuchamp entered the first ballroom in Australia which had been honoured by his presence.

Close to the door of a nobly proportioned, brilliantly lighted, profusely decorated, and extremely well-filled apartment, stood their noble friend and host, gorgeously attired in the uniform of a colonel of Landwehr, and shining like a constellation of the first magnitude among the more unpretending naval and regimental officers then quartered and stationed at Sydney.

As he took the hand of Miss Frankston, and bowed low over it, with an assumption of chivalrous deference only permitted to a foreigner, Ernest felt a mad desire to then and there kick him down the stairs of his own ballroom. Controlling this perhaps not strictly defensible impulse, he drew back, as the Count shook Paul's hand with a delicate yet cordial deference appropriate to an honoured father in prospect, and, evidently to that nobleman's astonishment, bowed very stiffly and followed his friends. A large family party, including half a dozen smiling and whispering girls, evidently delighted by the cordial welcome they experienced from their distinguished entertainer, covered his retreat. The night was superbly beautiful. At no great distance lay the slumbering sea-lake; while over the silver plain clusters of glancing lights gleamed, beneath the broad illuminated balcony of the ballroom. Unless Ernest's heart had been much more ill at ease than circumstances rendered possible, it would have been hard at his time of life for aught but pleasure, for a little space, to bear sway.

The floor was perfection; the music, that of a military band, which had but the year before played in the great square at Pera, which had been at the front during the terrible northern campaign, yet fresh in men's minds, well coached by a music-loving fastidious colonel, was pealing out the 'Schöner blauer Donau' with wondrous time and spirit.

Mr. Neuchamp had been sufficiently awake to his opportunities to engage Antonia for the first *deux-temps valse* after they entered the room, and the after-supper galop, taking his chance of anything intermediate. 'That is good music,' said he; 'I heard it in Vienna last. Suppose we join these very sincere performers.'

Antonia replied by a frank smile of assent, and as he took one comprehensive glance over face and figure ere he clasped the slight yielding waist, he thought he had consistently underrated her beauty.

The light was of course eminently favourable to her clear though colourless complexion; her eyes, sparkling with frank unstudied enjoyment of the entertainment, shone with unwonted lustre, while the perfection of her slight but rounded figure was clearly apparent, and as they swept adown the crowded

hall Mr. Neuchamp, though he had not been numbered among the lavender-kid-wearing tribe of modern youth of late years, danced very well, and we may add looked very well, in that much-abused but as yet unsuperseded garb, than which no other befits so well a gentleman on evening pleasure bent. Perhaps we have not devoted sufficient space heretofore to the limning of the hero's personal charms and graces. These were perhaps sufficient though not remarkable.

Ernest Neuchamp, somewhat above the middle height, had, without any particular athletic ostentation, the square form and well-knit figure of an ordinary English aristocrat. Though possessing more endurance than strength, he by no means fell short of that necessary endowment. One saw fairly regular features, comprising a pair of searching grayish blue eyes, very multiform as to expression, a clear-cut firm mouth, and light-brown hair inclining to curl, which I need not say was very closely cut on the present occasion. Brown-bearded, and rather sunburned, as to his original delicate complexion, he was by no means a bad representation, had he donned armour, of one of his crusading ancestors just returned from Ascalon or Engadi with all the prestige of a good knight and a whole heart for the ladye-fayre, who awaited his coming amid her bower-maidens.

As it was he was restricted to the simple dress, the simple speech, of a modern English gentleman, yet was there about him a freshness, sincerity, and unassumed refinement of manner not unlike that of the best class of naval men, which made him extremely acceptable to women, and which Antonia Frankston in her heart of hearts had always recognised.

The dance was not a particularly short one. Ernest was in reasonably good training after his up-country experience, and Antonia was one of those rare too rare danseuses that unite in perfection time, pace, grace, and staying power. She could fly down the crowded ballroom properly supported by a partner *de la première force*, halt, turn, glide in and amid the labyrinth of dancers, without thought or question of collision. Instinctively true to every note of the music, to every movement of her partner, she seemed as if she possessed the latent power and tireless speed of Atalanta of old, did she but deign to exert them.

The music ceased, annotated by a very audible sigh on the part of Ernest, who was impelled to say that he never expected to enjoy a dance again so much as long as he lived.

'There is nothing like dancing,' said Antonia, apparently as cool as a statuette. 'But I think the balcony will be pleasanter. I must show you all the people.'

In their path was a portly white-waistcoated personage of placid and smiling aspect, who, bestowing upon Antonia a most respectful bow, shook Ernest's hand warmly.

'Ah, Neuchamp my dear fellow, delighted to see you. Not

bought a run yet? You're losing splendid opportunities. Let Gammon Downs slip through your fingers—eh? Sold it to Rawson and Rowdy since. Great bargain.'

'Indeed!' said Ernest, smiling. 'Well, they are the best judges of their own line of action. How are they doing? Making lots of money?'

'Well, they ought to—ought to—but I'm afraid they're not very good managers. Rawson's rather slow—Rowdy's too fast. However, I can't help that. Do you happen to want a crack run, my dear Neuchamp? I've got Brigalow Park and Mallee Meadows for sale, a real bargain; quite a——'

'Not just at present,' said Ernest, preparing to move past. 'See you at the club. The Count seems to be enjoying himself—who is the lady?' This last observation was elicited by the appearance of the noble host, who passed at a little distance with a very handsome and magnificently dressed girl upon his arm, talking in the most *empressé* manner; while she, conscious of being at that moment an object of envy to the great majority of her sex, there and then present, listened with apparent pleasure.

'Oh, that's Miss Folleton, of Fairmount. Fine girl, isn't she? Will have forty thousand on her wedding-day,' said Selmore, who knew everybody and everything; or said he did, which was much the same. 'Not that Von Schätterheims cares for that. Immense property of his own, vast estates in Silesia, nearly as many sheep as Esterhazy—that's why he comes out here. Thinks of investing—met him abroad myself.'

'Indeed,' said Ernest; 'haven't you anything that will suit him?'

'Well,' said Selmore, looking for him slightly confused and glancing at Antonia, who was regarding him critically, 'I told him that Mallee Meadows and the other place might suit him, but he wants a resident partner. How would you like to go in with him? You're just the man that would suit him.'

'Can't bear partners,' replied Ernest shortly; 'I am afraid his highness and I wouldn't agree. I think I see a seat, Miss Frankston.'

'I dislike that man intensely,' said Antonia, as they moved on. 'I think him so selfish and unprincipled. I wonder if he has inveigled the Count into one of his bargains, as he calls them?'

'From a cursory examination of your high-born friend's conversation,' said Ernest, 'I think he may be trusted to take care of himself in matters of finance, as indeed is the case with most foreigners.'

'Now, is not that a very prejudiced though English speech? You cannot really believe that because a man is born on the continent of Europe he must be less trustworthy than any one from that wonderful little island of yours?'

'I didn't say so; I ought to qualify such a wholesale senti-

ment. Whether the right sort of foreigner does not emigrate I cannot tell. But the idea has struck others besides myself, and I must confess to a "Dr. Fell" sort of instinctive feeling about our distinguished friend.'

'Sheer prejudice and perhaps the least bit of jealousy, shall I say, on your part,' continued Antonia.

'But why jealousy?'

'Well, I mean it to apply to all of you men who run down the poor Count so. We are all great admirers of him, and that, I am afraid, does not make him popular with your sex. Here's Mr. Croker coming to claim me for next dance. There now, he'll abuse him—but he does that about everybody. Are you sure that this is our dance?' mischievously commenced the young lady, as that gentleman arrived.

'I think so,' said Croker superciliously, 'unless you have a chance of the Count, in which case of course you'll throw me and Neuchamp over—I expect nothing else.'

'Not surely if I were engaged to Mr. Jermyn Croker,' said she; and looking at her programme, 'I really am engaged to you for the quadrille, but why am I accused of pursuing the Count von Schätterheims?'

'Because every one runs after him—men, women, and children,' said Croker. 'The whole city seems transformed into a sort of Bedlam.'

'But why do they run after him?' inquired Miss Frankston.

'Why?' repeated Mr. Croker, with an air of ineffable disdain, 'because they're all fools, I suppose; except a few, a very few.'

'And why are they excepted?' said Ernest, who commenced to be amused at his daring unsparing cynicism.

'Because they're mad—stark, staring mad.'

'Now really, Mr. Croker, don't you believe about the Count's great wealth and estates? his charming manner at any rate can't be put on.'

'I believe in him. I?' demanded Croker, with an air of intense and reproachful amazement ludicrous to witness. 'Do you know what my opinion of the fellow is?'

'Can't say, really; something very complimentary to him and diffident on your part, judging from Mr. Croker's well-known character,' said Antonia coolly.

'Well, then, if you will have it,' said that satirist wrathfully, and as if all necessity for social dissimulation had been obviated, 'I believe the fellow is an impostor and a swindler; very likely a valet, or a courier, who has bolted with his master's cash, clothes, and papers. As for his manners, everybody in the country he comes from has the same manner, from the kellner to the kaiser. His accent ought to betray him; but no one here knows German well enough to find it out.'

'Really, Mr. Croker, you can take away a man's, a horse's, or a country's reputation more completely in less time than any

one I ever met. You're so delightfully bitter that I *must* dance with you. Come along !'

Left to himself for a while, Mr. Neuchamp devoted his leisure to a survey of the room and the company. He was astonished at the beauty and grace of the lady portion of the guests, and he thought he had never seen anything more graceful than the ease and celerity with which the greater part of the crowd glided in the dance over the polished floor.

The occasional squatter, lounging, but stalwart and dignified, together with the gay uniforms of the soldiers and blue-jackets, gave novelty and contrast to the scene ; but the majority of the younger men who belonged to Sydney proper were pale, slight, and rather undignified youngsters, by no means worthy the handsome stately girls who were fain to accept them as partners. For the rest, the ordinary ballroom routine was not departed from ; and Ernest, after another dance or two, was not sorry when the move to supper reminded him to possess himself of Antonia, who had promised him the first following dance.

Nothing in its way could have been more complete than the dangerous and superfluous but fascinating meal. The wines were chosen with a studious care, which reflected the greatest honour upon the Count's taste and foresight.

The champagne and chicken had been succeeded by fruit and flirtation. The ladies were in expectation of the accustomed signal, when Mr. Hartley Selmore rose, 'with the permission of his friends, to make a few observations and to propose a toast. Would gentlemen, ay, and ladies too, fill their glasses, and prepare themselves for a toast to which his poor powers were miserably inadequate?'

These preliminary suggestions were cheerfully complied with, as indeed is invariably the case, the cheapest of all compliments being, surely, to drink another glass of wine at the expense of your entertainer. Then, with one hand in the breast of his ample waistcoat, Mr. Selmore smilingly confronted the expectant throng, and with the readiness of a born talker and something of the ease of a trained orator, thus delivered himself :—

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN—One of the first observations that we shall make when we leave this hall will assuredly be that we never spent a pleasanter night in our lives, never saw any festivity more perfect in the arrangement of every detail, never had the good fortune to accept more lavish and splendid yet delicate and graceful hospitality. Then why not say it now? (Cheers and approbation.) Frankly, then, even in the presence of the noble and distinguished personage who has honoured this colony, this city, this society, with his presence, I venture to avow the sentiment of my heart, of every heart, let me say, now beating responsively to these humble expressions of the general feeling. (Loud cheering.) Some of us may have been struck with the wonderful perfection which has accompanied every detail, however small, even to the novel arrangement of the matchless feast we have just arisen from, but who does not know that the master mind, which is capable of conceptions the most vast and

varied with regard to the welfare of nations or the march of armies, disdains not to stoop to the peasant's farm, to the soldier's shoe-buckle.

When I lead your minds, ladies and gentlemen, to the idea of the characteristics of great generals, of reigning princes, of the blood-royal of one of the most ancient sovereignties of the universe, am I violating any confidence when I state, in corroboration of that half involuntary disclosure, that no one who, like myself, has had the privilege of beholding those royal personages, of marking their prevailing type of feature, can doubt, by comparison with the countenance of our noble entertainer, the Count von Schätterheims, of his near and intimate relationship with that royal house. (Tremendous and enthusiastic cheering, with direction of all eyes upon the Count, whose presumably princely lineaments were as immovably unconscious as if he had been a statue of Kaiser Fritz.)

I may be indiscreet, ladies and gentlemen; I may, carried away by my natural feelings of friendship and by the contagion of your enthusiastic assent to my simple and straightforward statements, have spoken with more frankness than prudence, but my heart forgives me; my noble friend, I feel assured, forgives me; and you, ladies and gentlemen, will, under the circumstances, forgive me also. I have the liveliest pleasure in proposing the health of the Count von Schätterheims.

When the storm of cheering, the volleys of applause, the waving of handkerchiefs had subsided, the noble Count himself, rather pale, but collected and calm as of custom, rose in his place to return thanks, which feat he performed as follows:—

LATEES AND GENDLEMENS—Many very danks.

The return speech had the merit of brevity—perhaps in excess; but as the Count placed his hand on his heart and bowed low thrice, throwing all the expression (and that was a considerable allowance) that he could manage into his eyes, so directed that not only Miss Folleton, but at least six other young ladies, imagined that she alone was the object of those tender and pleading glances, it suddenly struck the assembled crowd that it was an intentional and masterly stroke of mingled humour and consideration. As the band, by preconcerted signal, struck up the glorious and entrancing galop which had been kept in reserve for the after-supper dance, the ladies and the younger men saw another instance of the Count's marvellous foresight—for them in particular—and once more they joined in general and unmeasured applause.

The Count, who had by this time secured the radiant Miss Folleton, bowed low and led the way to the freshly decorated ballroom, all the approaches to which were filled with the choicest exotics.

Was not it an utterly perfect galop, such as that entrancing after-supper dream-dance with the 'dear new angel,' or our favourite friend that used to be, 'Consule Planco'? Oh, the dances of our lost youth, realising in every gliding sweep and trancing whirl the most exalted conceptions of music, poetry,

choreographic grace, and intoxicating proximity to female loveliness, when, if at any time possible, a fold or two of the jealous marble of reserve is thrown back. Within a fast fleeting hour from this dance of dances did Mr. Neuchamp put Miss Frankston into the carriage attended by her grateful parent, who was truly tired of his life under circumstances of festivity, and dying to get to bed.

'Ha! Neuchamp,' said Croker, as he returned to the disenchanted ballroom, 'you look exhausted. Come and have a parting glass of the Count's Roederer. I stick to that; we shall never see any more of it, I feel sure.'

'Why?' demanded Ernest; 'you're rather hard upon our noble entertainer. You allow that his wine is very good.'

'Good wine costs no more than bad under certain circumstances,' replied Croker sardonically.

'What do you mean?' asked Ernest.

'Mean! Why that Yorick and Co. will never see a farthing of their money. I really feel uneasy about our share in the swindle,' continued Croker, filling a large glass with iced hock, then drinking it slowly and with great apparent relish.

'Great heavens!' ejaculated Ernest, 'I can't believe it. I won't taste a drop. And what do you suppose will happen to Von Schätterheims?'

'The devil only knows, who will probably stick to him for a season stanchly enough. He will make a bolt, or a warrant of extradition, including an assassination and two stupendous jewel robberies, will fetch him.'

'You are strongly prejudiced,' said Ernest, deeply shocked and ashamed of his own mild suspicions.

'Slightly so, perhaps; it runs in my family. I detest *all* foreigners and believe them to be capable of anything.'

'That's rather hard measure, don't you think?'

'Not at all,' said Croker, finishing the wine. 'Foreigners are not so madly given to travel as we fools of English people; take my word for it, no foreigner of character and position would come out to an infernal hole of a place like this colony. Your friend Paul seems shaky, slightly apoplectic, or perhaps complaint in the *chest*; half those mercantile beggars are shams. Daughter gone off very much, looks quite *passée*. Good-night, I'm off.'

With these few consoling remarks, which Ernest felt much inclined to resent by personal protest, Mr. Jermyn Croker betook himself to the smoking-room of the New Holland, whence, having abused the ball, the guests, the giver, the lights, the decorations, everything, in fact, but the wine, of which he certainly had secured his share, he departed to bed in a consistently uncharitable state of mind with all men.

Paul did not show up at the office next day, and as the afternoon had been fixed for boat-sailing, as a refreshing and suitable recreation to neutralise the somewhat reactionary season

which succeeds a ball, Ernest made his way to Morahmee soon after lunch.

There he found Antonia very becomingly dressed in yachting costume, which from its simplicity afforded a telling contrast to the *grande tenue* of the previous night. Paul, with a couple of sailor-looking men, was down at the jetty, and after a little preliminary trimming and delay in sending for extra ballast, they were all seated and skimming over the bright waters of the harbour, with a light but favourable breeze. Mr. Windsor, invited by particular request of Mr. Frankston, sat forward in company with the crew, and assumed an air of ease and satisfaction which that roamer of the waste was as far from feeling as a pilgrim Bedouin on board a Red Sea steamer.

But no thoughts, save of the most childishly unalloyed happiness, possessed the hearts of Paul Frankston and his daughter. The old man was a born and bred sea-dog, and it was wondrous to mark how his nature rose and became exalted as he found himself upon the familiar element on which the joyous time of youth, the *sturm und drang* period of his strong manhood, had been passed. Again his eye lightened, and the old gleam of pride and daring spoke from it of the days when he had volunteered for more than one maritime forlorn hope; had consorted gaily with danger; had dared the clubs, the poisoned arrows of cannibal savages; or had cowed a mutinous, scowling crew by the magic of a stern front and a steady pistol. Even his voice was altered, and he gave the slight but necessary orders in a clear peremptory tone of command which Ernest had never heard from his lips before.

For Antonia, she revelled in the free breeze, the brilliant sea and sky, like a happy child, and as a glancing spray fell lightly over them, she carolled forth the refrain of a sea song with a nerve and animation by no means usual.

'Is not this lovely fresh life a renewal of all one's senses?' she cried. 'I feel as if an additional one, indescribable and amazing, was given to me whenever I am on blue water. You know we are all great sailors and boatmen in this Sydney harbour of ours. Look at the numbers of skiffs, pleasure boats, and yachts that are now skimming about like seamews in all directions.'

'Rather too many for my fancy. Every now and then accidents occur, plain sailing as everything looks just now. The gusts which come down across these points are like small white squalls.'

'Ah! but the present, my darling old pappy,' sighed Antonia, 'what can possibly be more glorious for mere mortals? Why should we grieve ourselves with the past or possible sorrows? Can anything be more dreamily lovely than that pale amber sky over which the dark blue shadow is creeping from the headland? What can surpass the softly-gliding magical motion with so much swiftness and so little effort? I don't wonder

that a sea life has always gathered to it so much poetry and romance. I fell in love with a pirate once.'

'With a pirate? Where?' exclaimed Ernest, surprised out of the placid enjoyment which pervaded the whole party.

'In a book, of course,' answered she; 'you didn't think we entertained such gallant rovers at Morahmee, except, like angels, unawares? But he was such a delightful creature. I remember the lines still.'

'Perhaps you wouldn't mind repeating them.'

'Oh yes. I shall never forget them, I am sure,' the girl answered, looking seawards. 'I found them in an old—old—annual. You shall judge:—

'Our Captain, he is young and fair,
How can he look so young?
His locks of youth, his golden hair,
Are o'er his shoulders flung.

'Of all the deeds that he has done
Not one has left a trace,
The midnight cup, the noontide sun,
Has darken'd not his face.

'His voice is low, his smile is sweet,
He has a girl's blue eyes,
And yet far rather would I meet
The storm in yonder skies.

'The fiercest of our pirate band
Holds, at his name, the breath;
For there is blood on his right hand,
And in his heart is death.

'He knows he rides upon his grave,
Yet careless is his eye;
He looks with scorn upon the wave,
With scorn upon the sky.'

'Not a bad conception, I admit,' said Ernest, 'though, doubtless, violently untrue to nature. In all ages poets and romance writers, who are humbugs to a man, have laboured to unite personal beauty and winning gentleness of manner with the capacity for remorseless crime. I think, perhaps, that the young Spaniard in *Tom Cringle's Log* is as good a specimen of the thoroughbred upstanding pirate as any of those gentry whose acquaintance I have made, like you, in print.'

'I saw eight-and-thirty of the ruffians strung up in one day, at a Spanish West Indian port, once,' said Paul. 'They said their prayers, kissed their crucifixes, and died in the coolest and most edifying way.'

'And were they very bad men, papa?'

'Awful scoundrels,' said her father, with a certain relish, as

he recalled the reminiscence. 'We only escaped them by a miracle; so I felt no compunction in seeing them elevated.'

'And what became of the ship they did capture?' inquired Antonia.

'They took everything of value from the vessel, including a few prisoners they meant to ransom, and then scuttled her, leaving the crew and passengers to perish.'

'How fiendish! and they were nearly catching my darling old father,' exclaimed the girl. 'I must reconsider the question of pirates. But were they all as bad as that, papa?'

'Worse, if possible,' said Mr. Frankston uncompromisingly. 'They knew that there was a rope ready for each man's neck when he was caught, and this knowledge did not incline them to mercy, you may be sure. Chinamen are perhaps as dangerous rascals, in that line, as you can meet. They are no great sailors; but if you get becalmed in their waters, and a few crowded prahus come round you, your chance is a bad one.'

'And will they fight?' inquired Ernest. 'I thought one jack-tar was worth a dozen of them.'

'So they are in one way—in a fair fight, or in a case of boarding, or in bad weather. But these vagabonds are very careless of life. They never give quarter and don't care much about taking it, not being used to it, so you may imagine how they fight. I have seen a fellow fairly cut to pieces before he left off fighting, and I really believed—I was a boy then—that the kriss moved in his clenched hand after the arm was cut off.'

'In that case they may trouble the world yet,' affirmed Ernest. 'A nation of three hundred millions, with sufficient ingenuity to comprehend Whitworth and Snider, and animal courage to fight to the death, might execute another avalanche movement such as when Attila (of kindred blood, we must remember) swept over Europe.'

'Not in our time, at any rate,' quoth Paul, with epicurean indifference. 'Ah Tin will require a deal of drill before that march takes place. Now, then, here we are off Red Point. Suppose we get the lines out and have some fishing.'

The deep-sea lines were produced by the two 'waterside characters' who composed the crew, and suitable bait being forthcoming from some mysterious receptacle, the somewhat serious recreation of schnapper-fishing commenced. Perhaps the poetry of the piscatory art cannot be dissociated from the mimic ephemera with which the fisherman of Europe deceives the leaping trout and the king of all river fish, the mighty salmon, as the angler, standing under the ruined wall of a Norman stronghold, patiently whips the purling stream which has furnished relays of delicate fare for a thousand years. Nor is his sport heightened by historic association. The captor of *Salmo salar* passes from stage to stage of doubt, hope, fear, agony, despair, to unspeakable triumph, as after endless patient playing, he draws within reach of the deadly gaff the captive

monarch. But, Izaak Walton notwithstanding, a good afternoon's fishing in or off Sydney harbour, when the deep-sea denizens are fain and fearless, is not to be despised.

Mr. John Windsor was considerably surprised, though he was careful not to show it, as the first fish, a twelve-pound schnapper, came up glancing and glimmering through the clear water at the end of Mr. Frankston's line. A rock-cod or two, with their brilliant colouring, added to his wondering observation. But he was, perhaps, more nearly driven from his habitual coolness when a yard-long dogfish was dropped into the bottom of the boat, sufficiently near his legs to cause the lower portions of those limbs to shrink and stiffen, as the ocean-Ishmaelite snapped its sharp teeth within an inch of his ankles.

'I think we must have got about half a boat load,' said Paul at length, after a continuous course of baiting, lowering, and hauling up. 'As the day is so fine, we may go through the Heads for a run out, and then turn back and beat home.'

They glided through the comparatively narrow entrance, on either side of which frowns sullenly the vast sandstone promontory, seamed, channelled, and scarped by winter wind and ocean wave, that for ages have raved and dashed against its sentinel form. Southward a mile or two, and still the deep sea rolls on with slow but resistless force against the base of the tremendous, all inaccessible cliffs which frown a hundred fathoms above.

'I never pass this place,' said Antonia musingly, 'without thinking of that heartrending wreck of the *Dunbar*. A wreck, at best, is a dreadful thing; but think of these poor creatures, as near to their journey's end as we are now, only to find a death in the midst of angry breakers and rocks and the dread midnight. How many deaths must they have died! God save us all from a fate like this—

'On the reef of Norman's woe.'

'I did hear something about a vessel going on shore with all hands, near the Heads,' said Ernest. 'And was this the very place? Was there any carelessness?'

'Poor Grant was as good a seaman as ever trod plank. I knew him well,' said Mr. Frankston. 'He had been first mate of her for years, under old Fleetby, and this was his second voyage in command. He was as smart a man as Charley Carry-all, and that is saying a good deal.'

'What was the cause, then, of the disaster? It seems so near the port of entrance.'

'It wasn't weather like this, you may be sure,' said Paul. 'Unluckily, after a first-class run, poor Grant made the light, sometime after nightfall, on as misty, driving, dirty night as ever these old rocks saw. He stood off and on until an hour or so past midnight, when, finding the gale increasing and the wind setting in dead inshore, he determined to run for the

Heads, trusting to his own seamanship and his close knowledge of the channel, that he had passed through a score of times in all weathers, at all hours of day and night.'

'But how could he miss the proper opening?' asked Ernest.

'God knows! The weather was awful. The coast just here does change shape a little, as if there was an opening. The ship had been driven in too close ashore; if they saw the light-house, her course would bring her stem on to these awful rocks. It seems that they never knew their mistake till they were among the breakers.'

And how could that be known?'

'One man was saved,' answered Paul. 'The last thing he saw of poor Grant was forward, in the chains. That was just before she struck. When she did strike she must have gone to pieces in ten minutes, and two hundred passengers, who were dreaming of home and friends, or the sweet sight of shore with the morning sun, ere that sun rose were drifting or mangled corpses.'

'What a day of mourning it was in Sydney!' said Antonia; 'hardly a family in the city but had friends or relations on board. A favourite ship, with a favourite captain, numbers of returning colonists had waited or hurried in order to sail by her.'

'We must all take our chances, my dear, more particularly those people who are foolish enough to be sailors. Hector Grant met a sailor's death, and I'll swear he took his lot coolly when it came, caring more for the poor passengers than himself. For them it was different. I always pitied the landsmen and their families, when I stood a fair chance of going to Davy Jones myself. Hallo! the wind's shifted two points. There's an ugly bank, too. It will give us enough to do to get home before the southerly breeze comes up.'

As they commenced to beat back against the breeze, which, appearing to gain strength rapidly, necessitated rather more promptness and seamanship than their outward-bound voyaging had required, Ernest was constrained to admire the coolness and total absence of timidity which Miss Frankston displayed.

Doubtless she was accustomed to boat-sailing and yachting in all its various forms, and was familiar with the eccentricities of the harbour navigation. Still, as the breeze freshened, the sky darkened, and from time to time the spray broke over the tiny cutter, now leaning over till the gunwale dipped, in a manner that did not suit Jack Windsor at all, as the thought obtruded itself that if the southerly gale, which Paul Frankston's experienced eye looked for, broke over them before they reached the shelter of the solid Morahmee pier they might possibly founder, Ernest wondered if his fair companion fully realised her position, or whether her calm indifference was merely ignorance of the danger.

His mind was set at rest upon the point presently.

'Papa!' she said, looking first at the sky and then at the

merchant, who, with all the skipper in his stern set face and steady eye, was looking to windward not altogether cheerfully, 'don't you think we shall be hard set to get home before the "brickfielder" falls upon us?'

'I do indeed, darling,' said the old man. 'I wish I had been keeping my weather eye open, instead of gossiping about the *Dunbar* people, poor souls. For all we know, we may make another business of the same sort, in a small way.'

'Then don't you think we might carry more sail? You know poor little *Haidée* here will let you drive her under almost when she's on a wind, and a knot an hour more may make all the difference.'

'I think Miss is right, sir,' said the oldest of the crew, 'we've not a minute to throw away; and if it ain't coming up heavier and thicker from the south, my name ain't Johnny Jones.'

As the necessary dispositions were made, Antonia watched keenly and critically the altered motion of the boat, which lay down to the now angry sea, as if every fresh gust would bury her beneath the heaving billow; and having apparently satisfied herself that the maximum of speed, combined with the smallest possible margin of safety, had been attained, lay back and quietly awaited the progress of events.

'Hers is no soulless insensibility to danger,' thought Mr. Neuchamp to himself. 'Rather a full comprehension of risk, and even not improbable loss, dominated by the calm courage which wills and reasons in the face of death.'

'A perfect woman nobly planned
To——'

Mr. Neuchamp was prevented from continuing his quotation by a sudden ejaculation of Mr. Windsor, across whose person, as the boat dipped deeply, a wave of greater magnitude than usual broke and foamed.

'By the powers!' exclaimed he, 'this was never put down in the agreement, or John Windsor wouldn't have been here. Are you quite sure, sir, we ain't taking a short cut, and getting away from our regular track? I should like to get out of this trap and walk. I can swim though above a bit, so if we are regularly spilt I may, perhaps, help the young lady.'

'Do you know what that is?' asked Mr. Frankston, pointing to a black curved substance out of the water, and apparently belonging to some submarine monster which was proceeding in a parallel direction, and at no great distance.

'Not a know do I know,' replied the bushman.

'It's the back fin of a *shark*, and he's no small one either. He'd pick us up at his leisure, if anything happened to the boat, like a turkey among grasshoppers.'

'By George!' said the man of the forest, 'I wish I was on Ben Bolt now, without saddle or bridle, and him bucking his best, this minute! There is some get away, if anything broke,

short of your neck. But here it seems to be the Never-Never country, and no mistake.'

They had made what is nautically called 'a long board,' in tacking at immense angles, so as to take fullest advantage of the wind, which seemed to increase rapidly, until something like the foretaste of the fury of a gale was upon them. The sky had darkened; night was not far distant. The sea had risen, and the long-backed rollers made it increasingly difficult for so small a craft to avoid an upset. Nothing but the splendid steering of their skipper, the perfect handling of the crew, combined with the weatherly qualities of the *Haidée*, gave them the chance of riding it out.

'Steady all, and look out for your heads while she jibes,' sang out old Paul. 'I think we shall fetch smooth water with this tack; if so we're safe for dinner, with better appetites than usual.'

'And if not?' inquired Ernest with an anxious gaze at Antonia, who sat drenched with spray and pale, but with the most perfect composure visible upon her unmoved features.

'Did you ever hear tell of one Davy Jones?' made answer Mr. Frankston, whose furrowed face, torn with anxiety for the fate of his soul's darling, contradicted the lightness of his tone, 'for if we are sent back into the gale, we are very like to mess with him this evening.'

And now, as the tiny bark swung round to her altered course, and lying close up to the wind, flew down with hazardous swiftness towards the entrance to the little bay, which to them was a haven of safety, Ernest, true to his lifelong habit of observation, scanned the faces of his companions with half-unconscious curiosity.

Calm and strong sat the old man, with the tiller in his sinewy hand; his eye was steady, his hand was true, and none could have told by reading his countenance that the life of one he held a thousandfold dearer than his own hung on the balance of a frail boat and a stormy sea.

The two sailors had the ordinary non-committal expression always observable in trained seamen, unvarying apparently, whether a sail be split, a leak be sprung, or a hopeless fire be discovered in the hold.

Mr. Windsor, unconsciously holding on tightly to the thwart upon which he sat, as though looseness of seat might operate prejudicially, as in the countless equine dangers which he had braved, was evidently of opinion, with Panurge, that a cabbage planter was a man to be envied.

On the pale clear-cut features of the Australian maiden sat a wondrous calm, not wholly unmingled with mental exaltation, as of a Greek heroine devoted to death yet favoured of the gods. The wild night breeze had blown back her hair, yet, as she leaned forward and gazed fearlessly at the course, nothing could have improved the statuesque ease and grace of her pose.

One of the rare personages who, either from instinctive adaptation or finished training, seem identified with all sea life and adventure from the moment they touch the plank of boat or vessel, she appeared born to rule and glory amid the perils of old Ocean.

As she looked forward into the driving gale, a steady lambent light shining out of her clear dark eyes, Ernest Neuchamp thought he could trace more of the enjoyment that fearless natures extract from danger than of even reasonable apprehension in the girl's whole mien and bearing.

'Well, if we are to go down to the shades below,' thought he, 'no one appears to have more than a very slight objection to the cruise; Jack and myself, as being mere landsmen, alone excepted. Well, perhaps our luck will pull us through this time.'

As if in response to his unspoken half-thought, half-prayer, Paul Frankston broke the silence by saying with a different tone in his voice from its last intonation, 'By George! I believe poor little *Haidée* will do it yet. Yonder's the point, and I think we shall just be able to slip into the inner cove. Antonia darling, what are you thinking about?'

'I was thinking of my mother,' said the girl dreamily, as with an effort she changed her position, and reverted to an everyday expression of face and manner. 'I wonder if people know one another at once in the spirit world. Papa! I think I must begin to put a check upon your boat-sailing tastes, or you must get a Kanaka crew that can't be drowned. You are a little too venturesome even for *me*.'

As the boat glided in towards the Morahmee pier, and one by one thankfully exchanged the wet and slippery planks for the solid stonework, the sky darkened yet again, and the storm in its might swept over the angry waste of waters outside of the sheltered nook as if a fresh blast had been unchained among the far south ice-fields, and had hasted to the gathering where wind and sea revel in their mirth, and where many a tress of mermaiden hair mingles with the trailing ocean sea-flowers.

Mr. Windsor spoke no word until they had nearly reached the garden gate. Then he said respectfully, but firmly, 'I think I've seen all I mean to see of Sydney harbour, sir. I don't care if I never go fishing again, except off a river bank. If any one says there's three heads and not two, I shan't say whether they're right or wrong. The next time I'm a little tired of being John Windsor I shall stumble against Ben Bolt's hind-legs; but no more salt-water pleasure parties. I ain't on. Good night, sir.'

Miss Frankston did not appear at the dinner-table, but her father and Ernest recompensed themselves for their exertions and anxieties by a comparative liberal use of the wine-cup.

'Stick to that port, my boy,' said the old gentleman; 'one needs a generous wine after our little adventure—and a glass of

"hot stopping" won't do any harm afterwards. It was rather a near thing; fact is, I am *not* quite cautious enough, and fancy it like old times, when, with a Maori boat's crew, or these Kanaka fellows, it was next to impossible to be drowned. Drowned! If I'd gone down in my old whaling cruises every time I've been in a stove boat, out of sight of the ship, too, I should have been drowned a dozen times.

'Are accidents frequent in this port?' said Ernest.

'Well, there are not so many as you might expect, considering the number of yachts and sailing boats; but still they occur from time to time. You saw the way the southerly gale came on to-night. Well, with an awkward crew such a boat as ours would have been bottom up now as sure as we sit here. There was Colonel Bigges, who used to live at Point Piper; he was always boating, not a bad hand, but of course, no sailor. "Colonel," I said, one day, "you will have a trip too many if you don't mind."

"What makes you think so?" says he; "I'll sail you for anything you like. I'm going out next Saturday."

'Something made me say, "Then don't take the young ladies out, to oblige me." He had two daughters, nice pretty girls they were, too. Well, for a wonder, he minded what I said. What was the consequence? His boat was upset a mile from shore; he had two men-servants in the boat; they were drowned. The Colonel only reached land by the help of his sons, who were splendid swimmers. If the girls had been of the party nothing earthly could have saved them.'

CHAPTER XVI

THE pleasant days wore on until the less pleasant idea began to take shape in Mr. Neuchamp's mind that it had become necessary to consider the route once more. This sojourn in Capua could not be indefinitely prolonged. Either he must go back to Garrandilla or he must make purchase of a station on his own account.

After due consideration of the Garrandilla scheme it became apparent that another year of the routine life which he recalled would be unendurably dull, whereas a new station, his own property, a cattle run—for he was resolved to have no other—would abound in novelties, and above all, in opportunities for carrying out his long-cherished plans of reform.

The only difficulty in his path would be Paul's uncompromising desire to benefit him after his own fashion. For mysterious reasons he had apparently decided that he, Ernest, was not fit to run alone, in a pastoral sense, for another year at least. Mr. Neuchamp steeled himself to attack his provisional guardian on this point on the very next opportunity. He would enlist Antonia upon his side. He would recapitulate the reasons which caused him to consider himself the equal in experience of some pastoralists who had been all their lives in the country. Surely a man did not come ten thousand miles across the sea to a new, not to say unexplored country, to spend his life in looking on! He would press Paul hard. He would convert him, and then, hey for Eldorado, for Arcadia, for Utopia, with laws and ordinances framed by Dictator Ernest Neuchamp.

While at the club, an institution which became more pleasant in his eyes daily, and where he steadily enlarged the number of his acquaintances, he kept his ears open as to opportunities for buying station property advantageously. He had at one time been fixed in the idea of purchasing the cattle station of Mr. Jermyn Croker, about which that sceptical philosopher and Mr. Frankston had interchanged various pleasantries more or less acidulated. But it so chanced that among the honorary members who made their appearance from time to time at the club,

and enlivened or impressed its ordinary society, came a squatter from another colony named Parklands.

With this young gentleman Ernest was much taken, and they soon struck up a strong intimacy. Mr. Parklands was Australian-born, but not on that account to be credited with any deficiency of energy; on the contrary, he possessed so much vigour of body and of mind that if he had degenerated in any way (as is a received theory with certain writers), his progenitors must have been perfect steam-engines. He was well known to have explored a very large proportion of the Australian continent, to have formed, managed, bought, or sold at least a score of cattle and sheep stations. His transactions comprised incidentally thousands of cattle and tens of thousands of sheep. He had recently returned from another colony where he had acquired an immense area of newly-discovered country. He was on that account, he stated, ready to sell the remnant of his property in New South Wales on favourable terms.

Lal. Parklands was popular. A good-looking, pleasant fellow, went in for everything—billiards, loo, racquets, dinners, theatres, and balls, with the same zest, energy, and enjoyment which he threw into all his business operations. He strongly advised Ernest to 'tackle old Frankston,' as he expressed it, upon the subject of his independence, and to go in for a station on his own hook without delay.

'It isn't because I'm selling out myself that I say it,' he added, 'but the fact is, cattle are as low as they can possibly be, and the next change *must* be a rise. What do you say, Croker?' he asked of that gentleman, who now lounged up. 'You have had something to do with lowering the people's spirits about their stock. If you'll come to Queensland with me next time I want to buy there, I'll pay your expenses.'

'It is apparent,' replied that gentleman, 'that somebody is sure to swindle Neuchamp, and you may as well do it as any one else. I thought I was to have the honour, from what old Frankston said, but I suppose you have made highly-coloured representations after the manner of cornstalks.'

'You are fatally wrong, as usual, Jermyn. I've made a pot of money out of Rainbar, and if Neuchamp buys it and does as well, he'll be able to go back to Europe as a successful colonist in no time.'

'If he takes Mr. Parklands as his model in speculation, management, and conversation, he *must* succeed in everything he undertakes,' said Mr. Croker with ironical approbation.

'Come and have some sherry, old Bitters,' said Mr. Parklands cheerfully, 'and then I'll thrash you at billiards. Never saw an Englishman I couldn't give points to yet. Can't lick us.'

Roused by this national reflection, Mr. Croker offered to play for anything he chose to name, and Ernest betook himself to Morahmee. He had determined to open the parallels without delay.

Full of this noble resolution, Mr. Neuchamp only waited until Antonia had departed from the dining-room to commence the momentous project.

'I begin to feel,' said he artfully, 'that my holiday is drawing to a close. I don't think I ever enjoyed town life thoroughly before. But one can't always be on furlough. I must join my regiment—must be off to the bush again.'

'What's the hurry?' said Mr. Frankston. 'Nothing much ever goes on at a station until the cold weather sets in. You will find Garrandilla wretchedly dull after club-dinners, ball-going, boat-sailing, and all the rest of it. Even the verandah here is considerably better of a hot evening than those rascally slab huts.'

'You have been a sailor, Mr. Frankston,' said Ernest, 'and you know that when the sailing day comes, and the wind is fair, Jack must get on board. I don't suppose you find Captain Carryall would make much allowance for lagging.'

'No, faith. He would need to be a smart fellow to stand before Charley if he kept him humbugging about when the barque was empty and the whaling gear in trim. But you are not shipped as an A.B. anywhere as yet. Make the most of your young life, Ernest, my boy—it won't come twice.'

'There is a time for all things,' rejoined Mr. Neuchamp, who had small reverence for play in the abstract; 'I came to Australia principally for work, and I shall be uneasy until I am fairly in harness. But without beating about the bush, I am impatient to purchase a place of my own, and unless you are inexorably averse to the step, in which case I should give in, I feel the strongest desire to make a start on my own account.'

'Why won't you be content to sail by my orders for a while?' said Paul, much disturbed. 'If you knew how many young fellows I have seen ruined all for the want of a little delay, for want of following the caution I have given you, you would not be in such a hurry to risk your fortune on a throw.'

'But consider,' said Ernest, perceiving, as he thought, a slight sign of compromise in Paul's candid face, 'I am not exactly like other young fellows, with the same intentions. I have had in reality more experience in the time of my novitiate than they have had in double the period. I have had road work, station work, sheep and cattle management. I have had, from peculiar circumstances, more than ordinary advantages of practical teaching, and I do myself consider that unless I am duller than ordinary, I may be trusted to manage a moderate-sized cattle station, if you will help me with your advice in the purchase.'

'Well, I don't know,' said Paul, passing through into the verandah, and lighting the cigar of reflection, 'I don't know but that, as you say, you have had rather more luck than common in your apprenticeship. You have been before the mast too, as we say on board ship, and that is a great help. You are as

steady as a church. That's all to the good, no doubt. But what I am afraid of is a sudden turn in prices—stock can hardly be lower, to be sure. Well, well—you can only risk it. But I don't want to see you, as I have seen many a good fellow, lose his money and the best years of his life, and either die, go to the devil, or settle down to the banishment of an overseer's berth.'

'Like poor old Geoffrey Hasbene,' said Ernest; 'I don't think I could quite endure that, though the old fellow is resigned enough.'

'I remember him well enough,' said Paul; 'it's a good while since I heard his name. I have seen him ruffling it with the best, and the owner of a good station. He was not very fast either.'

'And what ruined him?'

'Partly bad luck, partly a careless, easy-going disposition. He thought more of his house, his stables, and his garden than he did of his stock, and that was the end of it. Mind you take warning by him.'

'I hope I shall—but now that you think I may really make an attempt to fly off the nest, might we not settle something about the probability of a purchase to-night?'

'Yes—perhaps—yes,' answered Paul, seating himself with a resigned and gloomy air. 'I suppose you have heard of a place or two at the club. There's a good deal of business done there. Has Jermyn Croker said anything to you further?'

'Scarcely, but a young squatter named Parklands has a place that seems suitable; he appears a nice fellow enough.'

'Oh! young Parklands—humph! Very nice boy—quite sharp enough, but I don't suppose could let you in very extensively. Well, I'll inquire to-morrow; better leave that part of it to me. I'll see about Croker's place also. Plenty of time. Market full of sellers, and very few buyers. Cash very scarce. But that's all in your favour. Antonia!'

'Here, papa,' said that young lady, joining them, 'what is the matter? has anything happened, that you look so serious?'

'Well, that's as it may be; Ernest here is bent upon buying a station at once, and I have been trying to show him the prudence of waiting.'

'But he can't wait years and years,' said Antonia, taking, to Mr. Neuchamp's great joy, her powerful aid to his side of the suit. 'I don't think *you* would have done it either, you impetuous old dear; didn't some one run away to sea like a naughty boy, and come back in a ship of his own—eh?'

'And suppose I did, you saucy puss, didn't I run the risk of being drowned, starved, burned, roasted alive, and all sorts of deaths; and if I had a son, I should think it my duty to warn him against the sea, as the worst profession in the world.'

'And he would think it his duty to go in spite of you. Not that Mr. Neuchamp would do anything contrary to your advice,

I am sure,' said Antonia with a becoming blush, 'but I think he is wise in wishing to have a place of his own, and begin life in earnest. Besides, everybody says a cattle station is so pleasant, I almost think I could manage one myself.'

'Pity they should be so far from Sydney, or you might come and try,' said Ernest, with a grateful inflection in his voice. 'Waratah would distinguish herself in a camp, I feel sure.'

'I daresay we should do nearly as well as certain—hem—English people,' said she mischievously. 'I have always thought from what I have heard that life on a cattle station must be quite the romance of the bush. There is a sort of Bedouin flavour about it, with a necessity for good horsemanship that would fascinate me if I were a man.'

'Go and play something, like a darling,' said the old man. 'I feel a little like my namesake in the Bible—Saul, I mean—as if music could conjure the evil spirit out of me.'

It was finally settled, therefore, on that fateful evening, that Mr. Frankston should inquire about the station which Mr. Parklands had for sale, and decide whether it or that of Mr. Jermyn Croker would be the better investment.

The preliminary was carried out with business-like precision. Mr. Frankston called upon the cheerful Parklands and the desponding Croker and extracted from each, their separate temperaments notwithstanding, the area of the runs, the number, age and sexes, and condition of the cattle, and many other particulars, including the lowest price, necessary to a true and just knowledge of the bargain. He, besides this, set on foot inquiries among those of his numerous constituents who happened to be neighbours, and finally, after all these precautions, told Ernest that he thought Parklands' place seemed the cheaper, and that when it was formally placed under offer he had better go and inspect it.

The negotiations having proceeded to this desirable length, Mr. Neuchamp's satisfaction was unbounded. He saw himself placed in the position which he had long coveted, and pictured day-dreams. He would be a territorial magnate, having the right to rule over a region larger than the whole county wherein his paternal estate was situated. If he could not impose new laws he could justly administer the old ones. Visions of improved breeds of cattle, of a different method of treating the station hands, of developing the capabilities of the run, of making a fortune in a few years, and revisiting England. All these achievements rendered possible by that first bold step in actual colonisation, the purchase of a run, passed through his brain, with the lightning-like rapidity that was wont to characterise such mental evolutions, but which had of late been more infrequent. He did not confide these plottings against the peace of the district which he was to invade to Antonia. It was not from any decline of sympathetic friendship, but chiefly

because of late that young lady, now ever ready to approve of his wish to begin upon his own responsibility, seldom approved of his projects in advance of the age or of Australian ordinary bush customs, which she maintained had been formed by very shrewd and successful men.

It was necessary that Mr. Parklands and Mr. Neuchamp should meet at the station, so that he himself should be able to exhibit its special advantage. But that gentleman had far too many engagements to permit of his starting off at once upon this particular errand.

It was therefore arranged that, on a certain date, Ernest should make his appearance at a far inland township named Bilwillia, where he would meet Mr. Parklands, who by that time would have 'come across' from the Burra-warra-nonga, or some such easily pronounced locality, which he was compelled to visit regarding the approval of a small lot of ten thousand store cattle and fifty thousand wethers, under offer to him for the Melbourne market.

As nothing was to be gained by immediate departure, Mr. Neuchamp availed himself of this unexpected holiday with unrestrained satisfaction and enjoyment. He feasted upon his favourite authors and upon the newer publications which he was enabled to procure in Sydney, thanks to the excellent public and private libraries. Antonia and he renewed their literary labours and criticisms; and that young lady immortalised herself and completely subjugated Jack Windsor, by making a water-colour sketch of Ben Bolt in an attitude of mingled fear, wrath, and desperation, when unexpectedly confronted with a German band. It was Mr. Windsor's deliberate conviction, emphatically expressed, that 'a young lady who could take off a horse like that—the dead image of him—could do anything.' In truth, horse and man formed, at the moment, a study for an artist. The former with glaring eye, open nostril, sudden arrest of action, and capacity for the wildest outbreak; the latter sitting watchful, statuesque, centaur-like, a personification of equestrian strength and grace.

As the distance to Bilwillia was great, and its reputation unfavourable in the matter of horse-flesh, Ernest determined not to risk the safety of Osmund, whom he left in snug quarters near Sydney.

Mr. Windsor, much to his disappointment, received news of the illness of his mother, the only relative in the world, as he had often stated to Ernest, for whom he possessed a grain of affection. He was more strongly moved by the sudden announcement of her being sick unto death than Mr. Neuchamp thought possible.

'I don't half fancy,' he said, 'sloping and leaving you to go and take delivery of the place all alone by yourself, sir; and they say Mr. Parklands knows a thing or two. However, he's an off-handed chap, and the best thing you can do is to leave the

whole jimbang in his hands altogether. If you go barneying about calves, or counting horses that's give in, he'll best ye, as sure as you're born. So your dart is to say you don't know nothin' about cattle, and drop him in for the drafting out calves under age, and all them sorts of things. Then, as he's a gentleman, he's bound to give you a show. I ought to be along with you, I know. But I haven't seen my poor old mother for five years good, and I *must* go, if I was never to make a rise again.'

Jack departed, but he somehow found time to call at Walton's inn on his way to Appin, where his old mother lived and where he had spent his childhood. Ben Bolt had but little breathing time once clear of Sydney streets, and that wild steed of the desert was sensible of a decidedly quickened circulation as he was pulled up in the inn yard, and turned into a stall after a hurried and headlong manner.

As Mr. Windsor passed the door of the inn, he observed an immense quadruped hung up at the posts, which, but for the saddle and bridle, might have been taken for a strayed waggon-horse. The length of the stirrup-leathers conveyed to a bushman's intelligence the fact that the rider of this Gargantuan steed was an individual of unusual length of limb.

Passing quietly into the bar, and thence into a small parlour devoted to the family and particular friends of the host, he discovered the old couple, Miss Carry, and a stranger, whom he immediately associated with the charger aforesaid and with the district of the Hawkesbury.

'Well, Mr. Windsor, and who'd have thought of seeing you?' said Mrs. Walton. 'Have you and Mr. Neuchum—and a nice gentleman he be, surely—been in Sydney all this time? And where are you leaving for now?'

'We've been in Sydney all the time, and a very jolly place it is, Mrs. Walton,' said Jack, answering the old woman with his tongue and Carry's quick glance with his eyes. 'Mr. Neuchamp's just going up the country to look at a cattle run, and I'm going home to Appin for a short spell.'

'What are you going to do there?' said Carry; 'I thought you went everywhere with the young gentleman?'

'My poor old mother's very bad,' said Jack, looking rueful, 'and I must be home to-night, some time or other; but I don't think anything else would have kept me from going up with the master, to see him all right with this new station as he's going to buy.'

'Do you—live—at—Appin?' said the stranger young man, taking about a minute for the enunciation of each word, and speaking in a drawling, though not nasal, monotone.

'When I'm at home, which is about once in five years, I do,' answered Jack. 'You live on the Hawkesbury, and haven't ever been far from the river, I'll swear.'

'So I do, at Rooty Hill Farm, Nepean Point,' said the New

Hollander with a smile, which broke first upon the edge of the round plump face and gradually spread over it like the eddy in a pond. 'How—did—you—come—to—know?'

'By the look,' said Jack coolly; 'they don't grow such men anywhere else in the colony, except on the Hawkesbury flats. My name's Jack Windsor. What's yours, old nineteen stun?'

'I ain't nineteen stun, I'm only seventeen,' said the youthful giant, whose voice, however, did by no means correspond with his stature, being mild and small of timbre. 'My name's Harry Homminey, and I'll back our land to grow more corn to the acre, let alone pumpkins, than any farm this side of the Blue Mountains.'

'Like enough,' answered Jack indifferently. 'Shouldn't wonder if you took to pumpkins very kind when you was young. They're great feeding stuff. But your Windsor and Richmond farms is only handfuls after all. How many acres have you got?'

'A hundred and thirty-two,' said the Netherlander, with just pride, 'and never a tree or a stump on it.'

'Well, what's that?' demanded the denizen of the waste. 'Why, a child can take up three hundred and twenty acres in the bush anywhere. I wouldn't be bothered with land unless I had a whole section to begin with.'

'It's a deal better than no land at all; and that's about what you have, I expect,' said the agriculturist, gradually coming to the opinion and belief that Mr. Windsor was disposed to disparage him and his fat acres before Carry Walton.

'Never mind what I have, and keep a civil tongue in your head,' said Jack wrathfully; 'I'll give that round face of yours such a pasting that they will not know you from a Lower Narran man, only by your weight, when you go home. But I won't be cross to-night, and the poor old mother dying for all I know. Good-bye, Mrs. Walton; good-bye, Carry. I must be off.'

Mr. Windsor departed into the night and they saw him no more, but I am strongly of opinion that he managed to telegraph something to Carry before he gained his saddle, and if it meant unalterable affection as she understood it, whether it was the automatic process, or Morse's, who shall say?

Certain it is that she returned to the room with a serene countenance, and listened apparently with intentness to the somewhat uninteresting conversation of the man of maize and pumpkins, who eventually mounted his massive charger and trampled along the highway towards the rich levels of Nepean Point.

Mr. Neuchamp was so extremely anxious to make a commencement upon the foundations of his own experience and management that he left Sydney a week or two before the actual time necessary to reach the township of Bilwillia, where

he was to make rendezvous with Mr. Parklands. He purchased for himself a befitting hackney, and, not having Jack Windsor's aid, was beguiled into the possession of a stiff, short-legged cob, which his English tradition led him to believe would be the exact animal for a long journey and indifferent keep. Having gone part of the way by rail, he managed to reach the unromantic and extremely hot township of Bilwillia more than three days before Parklands could by possibility arrive, unless under the highly improbable supposition that he had more time than he knew what to do with.

Mr. Neuchamp was, as we have had before occasion to explain, by no means destitute of resources. If there was any interest whatever to be extracted from a locality, he was a likely man to discover and avail himself of it. But he afterwards confessed that he then and there felt more nearly reduced to the unphilosophical and indefeasible position of utter dulness than he could have believed possible.

For if any place could possibly combine extremest degrees of isolation, monotony, dreariness, and depressing discomfort, that place was Bilwillia. It straggled around the edge of a sombre watercourse, the ditchlike banks of which dropped perpendicularly through the clay, as if dug by some savage engineer centuries since. Around, anear, afar, all was plain and sky. The arid landscape was as boundless, monotonous, as the sea. The salsolaceous plants, within ten feet of the unbarked pine-posts of the rude verandah, were identical in appearance with every plant for a hundred leagues. Hill nor tree nor stone was there within a square of a thousand miles.

There were no books; no newspaper, save the *Bourke Banner*, a fortnight old, containing sundry local incidents, a short leading article, and a lengthy advertisement of Holloway's Pills.

On the fourth day, about the exasperating period of noon, when the 'blue fly sung in the pane,' and all the slow torture of Mariana in the moated grange transposed to southern latitudes seemed to be in process of representation, Mr. Neuchamp, to his excessive delight, made out two separate cortèges arriving from different directions. Both comprised mounted men and spare horses, and either of them might well be the long-expected Parklands. They were plainly steering across the wide plain for the Bilwillia Inn.

The first cavalcade was headed by an unusually tall athletic-looking personage riding a well-bred powerful horse, which evidently made little of his somewhat unfair weight. A sharp-looking elfish black boy and a stockman, at some distance behind, drove several spare animals, including a packhorse, upon the tracks of their leader. As they arrived at the inn, the gentleman in advance hung up his horse and walked into the house, while his attendants proceeded to unsaddle the whole troop.

Almost immediately after the full and careful observation of this party had been concluded by Mr. Neuchamp, rendered desperate by long abstinence from decent society, the second group gradually 'came up from the under world,' like a strange sail, and disclosed the form of a charioteer, with an attendant and spare horses. The driving was like unto that of the son of Nimshi, whom, in the matter of pace, Mr. Parklands resembled. And that energetic and punctual personage it proved to be.

'How are you, Neuchamp?' he called out cheerily, jumping down from an express waggon with a driving seat. 'Splendidly punctual, are we not? Had to come sixty miles yesterday, and five-and-thirty this morning. Can't lick us!'

'It was very good of you,' said Ernest most sincerely, 'to make a push. I do not know what I should have done if I had had to wait another day here.'

'You don't mean to say you came here before yesterday?' cried Mr. Parklands in tones of horror and amazement.

'I came three days ago, I am sorry to say.'

'Three days!' groaned Parklands, 'in this cursed hole. I wonder you didn't hang yourself, or go on the spree. But Englishmen never do that till they have been three years out from home.'

'Three years!' said Ernest, rather amused. 'Then there is a possibility of my taking to inebriety in course of time. It is rather alarming!'

'I have known many a good fellow take to it. All the same, I shouldn't say it was much in your line though, in three years or thirty. But didn't I see a tremendous long fellow go into the house, just as those other horses came up?'

'There was a very tall man at the head of yonder party,' said Ernest, looking over at the black boy and his companion, who was lighting a fire and preparing to cook. 'He is now in the hotel.'

'Aymer Brandon for a thousand!' said Mr. Parklands excitedly. 'A very old friend of mine, and the best fellow going. I suspect he has been over to his runs, on the Warrego. I'll soon lug him out.'

With this he dashed into the inn, and shortly reappeared in company with the tall gentleman, who, indeed, only required to be seen once to be easily recognised in future.

Mr. Aymer Brandon was presently introduced with great and joyous *empressement* by Mr. Parklands, who hung about him with schoolboy abandon. He was so considerably above six feet in height that Mr. Neuchamp and his friend, both well-built, middle-sized men, looked abnormally short beside him. Broad-shouldered, deep-chested, strong-limbed, his vast symmetrical frame seemed equally adapted to feats of strength or of activity.

'We are in luck, Neuchamp; Brandon happens to be going

down to one of his stations below Rainbar, and we can join forces—that is horses—and tool down luxuriously, four-in-hand. Can't lick us! I had a presentiment we should come out double sixes when I started.'

Mr. Neuchamp thought it would be most pleasant travelling. 'You see, your cob can go with the spare horses, which the boys will drive after us. Couldn't improve on the caravan if we'd planned for a month.'

Ernest would have modified his anticipation of comfort had he been aware that the larger proportion of the horses depended upon for this rapid and efficient journeying were, at that very moment, wholly unbroken to harness, having, so to speak, never seen a collar.

But this uncertainty of the future was as yet hidden from him, and the whole party proceeded to lunch, which, in consequence of much exhortation, with promises, and even threats, from Mr. Brandon and his friend, was, with the help of the omnipotent bitter beer of Tennant, by no means to be scorned in the wilderness.

'What's your waggon like, Sparks?' queried Mr. Brandon privately.

'Slap-up!' answered he with confidence. 'There's no brake; but that won't matter, as two of the horses have been in harness before, somewhere. We'll do the hundred miles to Rainbar in two days comfortably.'

'Nothing more complete could be hoped for on the Darling,' pronounced his friend calmly, 'so that's settled. I subscribe the black boy and five horses, which we can break in on the road. I hope the I. P. (intending purchaser) is a good plucked one, or he is like to turn back before reaching Rainbar, if he journeys with us in the waggon.'

An early start was arranged for next morning. Accordingly the half uplifted disc of the red sun of the desert irradiated the whole party on the farther bank of the river fully equipped for the road.

Aymer Brandon held the ribbons, while Parklands took the box-seat, in order to be ready in case of a complication with the scratch team. Mr. Neuchamp sat behind in company with Tom Fuller, a Rainbar stockman and past master in smashes of every kind, sort, and description on wheel or in saddle, on land or water, mountain or plain. The black boy, Eachin, rode in charge of the spare horses, amongst which was turned Mr. Neuchamp's Sydney cob. One of the unbroken horses was considerably placed in the near wheel, the other in the off lead. It being evident that all precautions had now been taken, Mr. Brandon sang out 'Let go!' to the volunteers who had assisted at the ticklish business of putting to, and with a shout, a double-thonger, half a dozen wild plunges, and an innocuous kick, the team settled down on the utterly perfect, firm, sandy road to something like racing speed.

There was little conversation for the first mile. Without a brake, all that could be done was to hold the team straight, shooting the gullies fairly as they came. Ever and anon, as a bar touched his hocks, the off leader kicked gaily over the traces, but finding the outer side yet more uncomfortable, kicked back again with discretion beyond his years.

Three miles had been swallowed up ere the team steadied ever so slightly. Then Brandon got his pull at them.

'Good travelling, Neuchamp?' said Mr. Parklands. 'Do the journey easy by to-morrow night. The day after I'll show you the finest lot of cattle in Australia—all reds, whites, and roans. Can't lick 'em!'

'Are they quiet?' asks Mr. Neuchamp, as a vision of back country cattle blacks and brindles, which he mentally vows to improve off the face of the earth, crosses his brain.

'Quiet?' queries Parklands derisively, 'why, you can't kick 'em out of your way.'

'I am truly glad to hear that,' says Mr. Neuchamp heartily, 'quiet cattle are so much pleasanter to draft.'

A ten-mile stage, at the highly meritorious pace alluded to, having been slipped over, the monotony of Australian steppe-travelling was varied by the introduction of two of Brandon's troop. They were, comparatively,

Wild as the wild deer, and untamed,
By 'trace and collar' undefiled.

The first introduced was a grand-looking old black horse, with a superabundance of pluck and one hip down. He was substituted for the offside leader, who was turned over to Eachin. The alteration was effected in five minutes, and old Darkie sailed off as though he had been carefully coached since colthood. This state of affairs was obviously too good to last. Not accustomed to winkers, the veteran, catching his toe in a root, went down like a shot. Now occurred a first-class complication.

'Total wreck, with loss of all hands,' concludes Mr. Neuchamp.

Not so. Parklands and Jem Fuller are down almost as soon as Darkie, and fasten on the horses like bull terriers in a rat-pit, while Aymer Brandon sits calmly in his place, and delivers his orders with the imperiousness of the skipper whose mainmast has gone by the board.

This was the situation: when Darkie fell the team was doing ten miles an hour. The wheelers swept over him, and he was brought up by the fore-axle of the waggon. Both check-reins were carried away and the lead bars broken. The near leader dashed round the back of the coach, where he was pulled up with a round turn by the strong arm of Mr. Brandon, who was engaged, as to his whip-hand in rib-roasting Darkie to make him 'come out of that.'

'Here, Jem!' he sang out, 'freeze on to this brute behind while I make that three-cornered calamity come out of his earth.'

Darkie, finding his position under the waggon becoming too hot, emerged dexterously, and stood upright under the off-wheeler, raising that unsuspecting animal's hindquarters upon his back. Having achieved which he awaited the next move, which promptly came in the shape of two terrific double-thongers. Upon this Darkie darted out, and at once commenced to feed till again wanted.

'My dear Parklands,' commenced Mr. Neuchamp, under-rating the variety of bush expedients, 'this is indeed unfortunate. I suppose we shall have to camp here until the harness is repaired.'

'Camp!' exclaims Parklands in wild amaze, 'we'll be off in ten minutes. Can't lick us.'

And in good sooth, a pair of spare bars having been rigged, and the checks spliced with bush buckles, within fifteen minutes they *were* once more under weigh and doing their ten knots an hour comfortably.

At two o'clock Toolara, a station which was the property of Mr. Parklands, and distant about seventy miles from Rainbar, was reached; there a good luncheon was secured. At four o'clock start was made to do the remaining twenty miles between them and Gregor's shanty, where the night was to be passed.

At Toolara the party was augmented by a tame dingo, belonging to Mr. Parklands. He was most appropriately named Beelzebub. For, in his own realm, the vast kingdom of this chief, he reigned unequalled.

A magnificent specimen of the Australian dingo, bright orange as to colour with a white ring round the neck, he boasted of long sweeping hair and was feathered like a Gordon setter. The intelligence expressed by his flag was marvellous, and its language various and comprehensive as that of a semaphore. His face alone, if fate had but permitted the painting of it to Sir Edwin Landseer, would have been well worth a thousand guineas at the Royal Academy. Plainly visible therein were foresight, decision, craft, and self-control, in sufficient quantity to furnish forth a Cabinet Ministry. You could not look upon the calm countenance without feeling a conviction that against all ordinary foes that gifted animal was safe, as Achilles upon the Trojan plain. Like unto the Homeric hero he was invulnerable save in one point, the poisoned bait, that talismanic safeguard which assures the pastoral future of Australia.

To his credit be it stated, Beelzebub did not in any way identify himself with the party, who were, through this discreet conduct, not included in the anathemas he was destined to bring down on his own head. He kept about a quarter of a mile from the road, in a course parallel with the waggon.

Five miles had been travelled when the first victim to his fiendish arts appeared. Norval, leisurely boiling the evening camp kettle, the while watching his flock peacefully nibbling towards the yard, is thunderstruck to see those splendid wethers, filled with salt-bush and water, suddenly sundered as if by a red streak of lightning, and the division farthest from him sent across the plain racing for their lives, with the devil himself whipping in.

Then does that unhappy Gael pursue, with his longest strides and Anglo-Ossianic oaths, but to no purpose. The astute dog-fiend, when the fat-laden flyers had collapsed suddenly and hopelessly, through sheer breathlessness, turns him round, curls his noble flag far over his back, and, like the famed coyote, 'vanishes through an atmospheric crack.'

This trifling adventure was witnessed by Brandon, Parklands, and Mr. Neuchamp with great interest. The sheep did not belong to them. The dog was fully believed to be a dingo errant, running his diurnal stage of duty. And, in the end, it would conduce to the benefit of the merino interest, as Norval would be roused into a course of spasmodic bait-laying, which possibly might bring a few genuine freebooters off their perches. Aymer Brandon, after a hearty laugh all round and the assertion from Sparks that they 'couldn't lick him,' dropped the whipcord on to his team and swept away over a splendid salt-bush plain, level as a bowling-green, though slightly differing in colour. As they threaded a clump of box, the corpse (apparently) of Beelzebub, was descried stretched out under a tree, looking rather more dead than the reality. The crafty one permitted himself to be passed without the motion of a muscle, and was no more seen until a mile or two on, when a cloud of dust, with a red thunderbolt darting to and fro therein, proclaimed the fact that another shepherd was in process of disestablishment.

The short Australian twilight had commenced, when Parklands took the reins to pilot the coach into a deep horse-shoe bend unknown to Brandon, near to the opposite bank of which stood the half-way house. At a nobly undeniable pace did the gallant Sparks tool through the glades of mighty red gum patriarchs, the roots of which, long fed by river springs, deep piercing the soft alluvium, had made them loftier, broader, wider of shade than the fatherland. He had shot more than one polygonum creek, straight and true as an Indian the Saults St. Marie's boiling rapid, when Brandon shouted, 'Where the blazes are you driving—slap into the river? I can't say how these nags will take a water jump!'

'By Jove!' said the iron-nerved Sparks, as with a clever sweep he came to anchor, the near wheels going several inches over the river bank in the operation, with a drop to the water at an angle of seventy-five or a hundred feet, 'so I am. Jump out, boys. Can't lick us.'

The events of the day had occasionally startled Mr. Neuchamp, but his *sangfroid* won the admiration of Parklands and his friend. He had exhibited no tendency to jump out before he was told; and Brandon was afterwards heard to state his conviction, that if Sparks had charged the Darling four-in-hand with characteristic carelessness of results, Ernest would have simply sat back and kept his chin up, in profound undoubting faith that he would be landed safely upon the opposite bank.

The horses were promptly unharnessed and turned out amidst luxuriant pasture, after which all hands crossed the Great River in Gregor's dug-out to that gentleman's hotel. An apology for the primitive appearance of the place was thought necessary by Parklands, so considerate ever is the outgoing proprietor to the intending purchaser. Ernest assured him that, though slightly inferior to the Royal, he had already, since his arrival in Australia, been lodged more humbly. Having witnessed one another's signature in passable whisky, towels were produced, and the dust of the day consigned to the river.

At ten o'clock P.M. all hands were ordered to bed by Aymer Brandon, in spite of Sparks's desire to describe a lovely damsel whom he had met when last in Sydney. She was his sixteenth engagement, but circumstances had compelled an irrevocable parting. Knowing that another whisky would infallibly bring on a retrospective history of the other fifteen, Aymer was inexorable and hunted the amorous Parklands to bed, where he was heard to murmur softly, 'Couldn't lick her,' as he dropped off to sleep.

Beelzebub, arising with the lark, promoted the next adventure, as follows: Gregor was out at cockcrow, to kill a sheep for morning chops, but found himself all too late. His fold, a hundred yards from the house, was dog-proof, with the exception of the hurdled gateway. Reaching it, 'all hunger-maddened and intent on blood,' he found another in possession actuated by similar motives. He beheld Beelzebub in the very act of devouring a six-tooth ewe—not the class of sheep usually selected for slaughter. 'Stiffen those blank dingoes!' roared Gregor, 'there goes a note!' Charging wrathfully into the yard, and unconsciously commending himself by name to his enemy, he assaulted the 'Evil One.' The instinct of the latter came primarily into play, thus assaulted unawares, and he sprang at the high slanting poles, all vainly. Not Cerberus himself could have cleared them. This false step was but the weakness of a moment. Logical reasoning, the result of civilised intercourse, reasserted its sway. Calm as Marlborough, he then comprehended the situation with a glance, and proceeded to execute the only strategical movement possible in the very pressing, or rather depressing, condition of the engagement.

Gregor, upon observing his abortive attempt to clear the fence, had rushed to the gate. The crafty one, with an innocent expression of countenance, and his flag curled gracefully over his back, trotted calmly towards him. Gregor timed the dog well, unknowing of his resources, and aimed a kick at him which would have stove in a thirty-ton cutter.

The Napoleon of dingoes, making a feint as if to dash through the gate, stopped abruptly. The harmless boot expended its force and momentum, with some inconvenience to its owner, against the gate-post. Ere a second *coup de pied* could be arranged, Beelzebub glided swiftly through, with his flag erect and waving gently from side to side in token of approval.

At breakfast Gregor gave a thrilling account of the havoc wrought in his flock, and solemnly swore that he had lifted the dog, with one kick, over the high palisades.

Parklands knowing the culprit and the utter hopelessness of any human effort to strike him without consent, felt no uneasiness. He also forgot to mention that the dog belonged to him. When Gregor was out of earshot Parklands (who was solely a cattle-owner), bursting with pride at the prowess of his pet, offered to lay Mr. Neuchamp a cool hundred that Beelzebub, bar baits, should eat all the sheep on any ordinary station in six months.

Mr. Neuchamp, not having studied the habits and capacity of the Australian dingo sufficiently to warrant his making a book on the subject, declined the wager.

'If I were you, Sparks,' said Brandon, 'the next time I was annexed by a young woman and wished to be off the bargain, I should make her a present of Beelzebub. If the "wily one" would not in a week sever the tenderest domestic ties, I am mistaken in his character. Wouldn't mind even laying him against a mother-in-law.'

An early breakfast of chops, fresh from the slaughtered ewe, a short but exciting voyage in the dug-out, and they espied their 'connecting link,' who was equal to most occasions, standing with his horses ready for harnessing. Their narrow escape on the preceding night was now plainly legible in the wheel tracks, *just over* the brink of the river bank, and even the reckless Sparks acknowledged it to have been 'a near thing.' Brandon now took the reins, lectured Sparks upon dangerous driving, and spun through the vast umbrageous eucalypti, towards the road.

Neither accidents nor offences occurred during the next twenty-five miles, at the end of which luncheon was spread by the side of a reed-bordered lagoon. As they had now entered upon the extensive territory of the Rainbar run, Mr. Parklands caught a horse for himself, as also Mr. Neuchamp's cob, with a view to rounding up an occasional mob of cattle and proving his vaunt as to their unsurpassed breeding and docility.

The opportunity soon occurred. A small lot of some fifty or

sixty head appeared about a half-mile from the road. Away went Parklands with Eachin and Mr. Neuchamp backing up. After a sharp ring or two the cattle stood with the horsemen around them. To Mr. Parklands' mortification and Brandon's wild delight, everything being plainly visible from the waggon, a huge coarse-horned, dun-coloured bullock singled out and 'went for' Ernest without more ado. The appearance of the brute was appalling, and his intention so obvious that Mr. Neuchamp did not hesitate to turn and fly across the plain for his life. The cob, though a fair roadster, was not constructed for violent exercise at short notice. He held on gallantly, but *bos ferox* gained perceptibly on him. At the half-mile end his horns were level with the cob's quarters, and Mr. Neuchamp had concluded to throw himself off and trust to the brute's continuing his mad career, when the cob, feeling that the game was up, stopped short, throwing his rider over his head. The bullock hurled past them with a snort of wrath and defiance, continuing his headlong course over the plain, in search of the first congenial scrub. When Parklands came up Mr. Neuchamp was gazing at his horse, which stood with its legs wide apart panting, with streams of sweat running down his flanks and even his face. His ears were dangling limply, and he looked very much indeed as if he were going to cry.

'Really, Parklands,' said poor Neuchamp, 'if that is a specimen of a Rainbar beast, I can well understand your saying that they will not get out of your way.'

'D—n the brute!' quoth Sparks; 'he does not belong to the run at all. Didn't you see the JS on his quarter? He is one of those infernal scrub-danglers from the Lachlan come across to get a feed. I'll shoot the ill-conditioned wretch if ever I come across him again.'

Upon being assured both by Brandon and Parklands that this was really the state of the case, Ernest continued his inspection of the remainder of the mob, with which he was well satisfied. Not to risk any further *contretemps*, Parklands then suggested a return to the known dangers of the waggon. This also suited the cob, who looked as if he had carried all his friend's money in a race and lost it.

'Ten miles from Rainbar,' sang out Parklands. The words had hardly left his lips when the fore part of the waggon sprang into the air.

'Hang on behind!' shouted Brandon; and another minute saw Sparks and Jem Fuller fasten on to the hind axle, backing for their lives. 'Man the horses, Eachin! Jem, you cut a straight sapling while we rouse out the saddle-straps for a splice.'

On inspection the pole was found to have snapped about a foot from the fore-carriage, upon which the broken stump, catching the ground, had turned that important part of the mechanism under the waggon, causing the alarming jolt. The pole being 'fished' with a pine sapling and numberless saddle-

straps, the remaining ten miles was safely accomplished rather under the hour with the middle of the mended pole trailing in the dust.

They were heartily welcomed at Rainbar by Mr. Brigalow, the overseer, who produced some good whisky, and with an invention of his own, called a geebung, a fair imitation of soda water was concocted, in which all present drank success to the purchaser.

On the morning after their arrival at Rainbar no time was lost by the restless Parklands, who was astir and alive to the utmost possible extent at daylight. Mr. Neuchamp, too excited to sleep during the night, had fallen asleep before dawn. He had but dozed off, it appeared to him, and now here was Parklands rousing up everybody, catching horses, whistling to the dogs, swearing at the black boys, throwing missiles at Brandon's door, and generally making as much noise as a dozen ordinary people. Where work of any general nature is on foot in the bush, breakfast is the first important stage, being indispensable, as, whatever other meals may be partaken of provisionally or left to chance, human nature urgently cries out for one 'square meal,' *pour commencer*. The cook therefore came in for his share of intimidation and criticism from this terrible early bird.

Eventually the whole party found themselves assembled for breakfast at the comparatively early hour of 5.30 A.M., while through the unglazed open windows they could see the partially filled horse-yard, in which stood every available screw and stock horse on the place.

'Now, Neuchamp,' commenced Mr. Parklands, only partially arresting the process of deglutition, 'we must come to a decision about the muster. I am bound by the terms of my agreement with old Father Frankston—rather a downy old bird, in spite of his jolly ways and out-and-out dinners—to get in all the herd and count them over to you. I would rather not do it, I confess; not because I'm afraid of my numbers, but it takes time. I have to be in Melbourne in ten days, in Adelaide in three weeks. Besides, it knocks the cattle about. Doesn't it, Aymer?'

'Of course it does,' assented that gentleman; 'but it has an element of safety about it, as far as the purchaser is concerned.'

'No doubt of that; but in cases where the books have been so regularly kept for years, as Brigalow's here, any man can see that he *must* get his numbers if he takes them by the book total, with a decent percentage knocked off for deaths, etc., for fear of accidents.'

'It occurs to me,' interposed Mr. Neuchamp, remembering Windsor's advice, 'that as I have actually no experience in taking over a herd like this, if Mr. Brandon would kindly act for me in the whole matter, I should be happy to leave the delivery in his and your hands, feeling sure that he could arrange it with you, in my interest, better than I could myself.'

'I could have no objection, of course,' said Parklands. 'I think it a very good idea on your part; and though Aymer is my oldest friend, yet I fancy no one would accuse him of not doing you justice in such a case as this. I don't think they'd tell him so, at any rate.'

'What a lazy beggar you are in small things, Sparks,' said Aymer. 'Why don't you muster the cattle, and have done with it? And why am I to be exalted into the position of your head stockman, and expected to back you up in all kinds of audacious fabrications in which I have no personal interest?'

'Who is lazy now?' sneered Parklands. 'Why can't you oblige Neuchamp and me also; it may be for the last time, for I shall never return from Melbourne alive, if the girls are half as pretty as they used to be. Besides, I give you full power to fix the percentage, inspect the books, knock off the price—anything you like, in fact. As a seller of unparalleled generosity, we can't be licked.'

'I shall feel really grateful, Mr. Brandon,' said Ernest, 'if you will consent to be my arbitrator and friend in the business.'

'Well,' said Brandon, stretching his vast frame and rising slowly from the breakfast-table, 'if both parties combine against me there is nothing but capitulation for it. I surrender. So we may go to work forthwith. There are the books for ten years back—certainly very neatly and regularly kept. Branded, so many; missing, so many; dead, so many; sold, so many. It strikes me, however, that one per cent additional might be added to the death-rate.'

'All right, old boy, knock it off,' exclaimed Parklands.

'Then, as to the brandings, nothing of course counts under six months. I observe that you and Brigalow had a very fair haul of calves about a month ago. I suppose none of them came from those outlying Wanilmah cattle of mine? We'll scratch *them* out of the count.'

'You be hanged,' explodes Parklands. 'I believe that old cattle-stealer, Weenham, that *you* call an overseer, is a long way on the debit side with me in the calf line. But scratch them out if you like. I hope you're contented now. I believe you're standing in with Neuchamp, and met accidentally by appointment at Bilwillia to have me.'

'I've not quite done with you yet,' said Brandon calmly, all unheeding of the gradually rising thermometer of Sparks's temper. 'What about those Back Lake cattle? It has just occurred to me that the last camp we saw there two years ago, when I helped you muster, contained an unusual number of "pigmeaters," even for back country. You can't charge our friend full price for them.'

'By Jove!' exclaimed Parklands, 'you're a friend in need. Well, of course we'll make a deduction for them. Though as the country is so splendid out there, and is easily watered by cutting a channel from the river, I——'

'Cost only two thousand pounds,' murmured Aymer.

'Go to blazes! Five hundred more likely,' said the sanguine Sparks. 'Well, say a hundred off for "ragers."'

'Must have a hundred and fifty,' placidly pleaded Brandon. 'Think of the danger and anxiety in muster times.'

'You're another!' burst out Sparks, now justly indignant. 'If I take off another penny for anything, may I be—'

'Well, I only want two more stock-horses now,' persisted Brandon; 'nothing here fit to call a horse that you could break your neck off creditably.'

'Where an I to get them, eh?' asked Parklands despairingly.

'Don't mind taking the two wheelers you drove up. Neuchamp will find them handy for practising four-in-hand with—the only fun he'll be likely to get here. And now, as I'm thoroughly exhausted and demoralised by unmasking your villainy, we'll adjourn to lunch. Can't lick us, eh, Sparks.'

'Well, of all the cold-blooded, grasping, unprincipled screws that ever imposed upon a warm-hearted proprietor under the cloak of early friendship, you're the biggest, you old humbug. Mr. Neuchamp, you never made a better bargain in your life, thanks to this long impostor. Let us have lunch on the strength of it; we'll do the arithmetic afterwards, and I shall be able to start at daylight. Can't lick us!'

Somewhat comforted by the notion that he would be able to depart without the enforced delay of a muster, and again commence one of his long and rapid journeys, made with the tireless celerity of a Russian lieutenant with despatches, Parklands ordered and attacked lunch with his usual vigour and determination. Mr. Neuchamp in his turn was shrewd enough to perceive that Brandon, having definitely, though unwillingly, accepted the responsibility of acting for him, had decided with the sternest impartiality between his friend and himself. He felt that equally by this arbitration or by leaving it wholly to Mr. Parklands he would in any case have been a considerable gainer by adopting Jack Windsor's advice, and he felt a lively satisfaction at the successful result.

Lunch having been disposed of, the trio sat down to the calculation, and the lowest attainable number of cattle, with their ratable money-value per head, having been produced as the result of Aymer Brandon's subtraction and addition, Mr. Neuchamp gave a cheque for the amount, signed with the hitherto unquestioned name of Ernest Neuchamp. In return he received a receipt from Parklands, reciting below that he had hereby purchased the right, title, and license to all those crown lands situated in the county of Oxley, and comprising the runs of Rainbar East and West, Warrah, Banda, North Banda, Back Banda, and Outer Back Banda, with two thousand head of cattle, more or less, branded LP, and the right to all cattle whatever bearing that brand not absolutely proved to be sold or demised by the proprietor or by his orders.

This feat fully accomplished, Mr. Neuchamp was congratulated by both gentlemen upon being the proud possessor of one of the best cattle runs of a very good district, and tolerably cheap too, as he was assured.

‘The fact is,’ said Mr. Parklands, ‘I should never have offered it at this price ; but I am going in extensively for a lot of new country upon the Darr, and I want all the cash I can get hold of. It’s necessary to buy money, you know, sometimes, and this is a case in point. If things go right, in half a dozen years I shall be able to sell runs by the dozen. Can’t lick us !’

CHAPTER XVII

THERE are several proverbial tests by which a man's directness and liberality of thought may be measured. The dividing of an inheritance has been found to divide for ever near and dear friends. The co-occupation of a house frequently leads to the severing of friendship. A sea-voyage of lengthened duration mostly displays the true nature of the human units, jointly imprisoned, with such alarming clearness that they tacitly agree to avoid each other ever after. But it may be doubted whether any process exceeds in thoroughness of assay the transaction known in Australia as 'giving delivery of a station.'

He who comes forth from that crucial test may, like the man who emerges scatheless from the ordeal of a contested election, plume himself upon wearing armour of proof. Is he inclined to parsimony, the handing over station implements, the unconsidered trifles counted, priced, or hampered up together, will convict or acquit him of the charge. Is he insincere, unscrupulous, careless, liberal, reasonably firm, ordinarily prudent, the purchaser will generally be able for evermore to speak with authority on these points. In the delivery of Rainbar there was perfect openness on either side, and the more Mr. Neuchamp came to know of the ways of the land the more fully did he understand, and more strongly affirm, that he had been treated in his first purchase with the utmost possible fairness and liberality. Every one had been moderately busy all day. Lunch had been a hurried meal. The latter part of the afternoon Mr. Parklands had devoted to looking after his waggon, packing his traps, and getting together his horses. He did not merely give orders, but thoroughly satisfied himself by actual inspection that no unforeseen obstacle or oversight could, humanly speaking, interfere with his leaving Rainbar at sunrise. While apparently immersed in these details, he, however, found time to suggest to the cook that this would be a favourable opportunity for him to 'impress himself,' as in all probability neither he nor Mr. Brandon would dine there again for years to come, if ever. The consequence of which well-timed hint was that a dinner of unparalleled excellence, for salt-bush country, was served at

7 P.M., the which Mr. Parklands, who had concluded his labours with just sufficient margin to admit of a swim with Brandon and Mr. Neuchamp in the river, definitely expressed his intention of enjoying to the utmost.

'I must say,' said he, as they sat down to this very creditable effort—the artist as usual might have sung with Lord Richard in the ballad of Alice Brand, 'I am a banished man' (too exclusive sacrifices to Bacchus having rendered metropolitan residence impolitic)—'that I prefer the principal meal to take place at the end of the day.'

'So do I, Sparks, my boy,' said Brandon. 'Industrious people like you and I require all the daylight we can get to energise in. Besides, there is something unrefined in a hearty meal and hot dishes partaken of at mid-day, to the injury of complexion and delay of business, and the serious damage of digestion, which abides not with anxiety and uncertainty of mind.'

'I thought every one dined early in the bush,' said Mr. Neuchamp, 'though I do not see why it should be an unalterable law.'

'There is no actual necessity for it,' said Aymer. 'It is false economy to the mid-day meal, which should be a light one, to confer upon it that improper dignity and position. I quite agree with Sparks that the cares of the day should be over before one undertakes so serious a subject as dinner. If it occurs at mid-day how can any one foresee that he may not be dragged away from the cheerful board and subjected to exercise or anxiety of the most violent description? How *can* any digestion so ill treated preserve its equanimity? and if one digests not, then is happiness fled for ever.'

'I feel a convert all over,' said Ernest. 'How capital this teal is; wherever did the cayenne come from?'

'Always carry some,' answered Brandon; 'it is like tea and tobacco, and bills of exchange, very portable. I like work'—here he slightly expanded his vast chest and raised his sinewy fore-arm—'but I may add, with even less risk of being contradicted by my friends, that I appreciate comfort.'

'*That's* true; in fact nothing could be truer,' assented Mr. Parklands; 'as to the work, you can do two men's share either at work, love, or fighting when you're regularly cornered. You and I used to hunt better in couples when we were youngsters. Couldn't lick us, eh, old man? Remember when we thrashed those five fellows with the store cattle that came ravaging through the run, and took the cattle from them?'

'We were boys then,' answered Aymer with a grave smile, 'now we're men and magistrates both; such escapades don't become us. But we had a few trifling adventures in the old days when we were taking up the Behar country.'

'That reminds me of the blacks,' said Mr. Parklands; 'they were awfully bad there. I'm leaving you a capital brace of niggers, Mr. Neuchamp, first-class hands with cattle. I forgot

them when Brandon was making his unprincipled reduction ; they're worth fifty pounds each to any man.'

'You would have made a splendid Southerner, Sparks,' said Brandon, who, dinner having been concluded, had withdrawn to the fireside and lighted a capacious richly-coloured meerschaum. 'What an eye you could have had for the points of a good field hand, not to mention those of a likely Octoroon. You're too fond of dealing, however, to have stuck properly to your hereditary bondsmen. I can fancy your swapping Uncle Tom, Aunt Chloe, and the rest of them for a gang of half-broken plantation hands, with a trotting horse thrown in for boot.'

'Well, I like variety, I own,' confessed Sparks, 'and can't bear sticking to the same style of country and stock for ever. But human beings make some difference in the calculation, though I don't know that *you* go so far, if all tales are true.'

'What do you mean, Sparks?' inquired Brandon, with a slightly roused intonation.

'Well, all the country heard that you and Lorton shot them like crows when you took up Tthoondula, after they had hunted the Dawsons off it the year before.'

'There was only one man shot the whole time I was there,' replied Brandon, 'and he was killed in an attempt to take him prisoner by Bothwell and his native police. He had nearly tomahawked Will Lorton, and but for accidental assistance would have had his scalp, figuratively, to a dead certainty.'

'How far was that from here?' asked Mr. Neuchamp.

'Fully eight hundred miles, so that there is no chance of your falling in for a blood feud. None of the slain man's kin could get here, if the life of the whole tribe depended upon it.'

'And was it absolutely necessary to put the aboriginal you speak of to death?' asked the philanthropic Ernest.

'It was necessary to punish any black,' replied Brandon, 'who raised his hand with intent to slay against any white man in that district and at that time. Without such a penalty implicitly carried out, the country would have become uninhabitable.'

'Suppose we have a glass of whisky,' proposed Parklands ; 'this is my last evening, and we must drink prosperity to Neuchamp, and success to all his undertakings. Here are the materials; and now, Aymer, I suggest that you give us the story of the man-hunt, where you were in at the death. Neuchamp is dying to hear it, and if you don't tell me, I shall never leave off spreading reports that you and Lorton killed a whole tribe in cold blood—men, women, and children.'

'There are only two courses open to me that I perceive,' answered Brandon: 'I must either knock you down and so trample out this slander, or tell the story my own way. I have a foolish feeling of compunction as to the former proceeding, so I may possibly gratify your curiosity. As Mickey Free says, the night is young and drink plenty.'

Mr. Neuchamp, though a foe to excess, did not disdain a moderate allowance of 'old spirits' from time to time. He was particularly led on this eventful night to bear himself in a sociable and sympathetic manner. There was no chance of work being done or thought of till morning light. So he drew up his chair, filled his glass, and looked fixedly at the calm features of Aymer Brandon, who, much pressed and entreated, at length commenced his tale of years long past.

'We had taken up Tthoondula, Will Lorton and I, only the year before, and we had fixed to commence our first shearing on the 20th of August. It was the 15th, so no time could be wasted. Small parties of shearers were camped by the edge of the long black gum-shrouded lagoon which had given its name to the run. No one could have imagined that the dark deep water was in reality transparently clear. The sombre hue produced by the illusion of a mud stratum, and the swart shadows cast by the huge eucalypti which lined its banks, caused one involuntarily to recall "the dark tarn of Auber," while as the pall of swift-speeding night fell heavily o'er the scene, it needed but little fancy to re-create the "ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir." Slowly on that eve dropped the sun behind the rugged "divide" which separates the Paroo and Warrego, leaving the rosy-lipped hills smiling adieu till the morrow. The frown on the face of the mulga-studded lowlands deepened, and the wrinkles harshly marked by many a tributary creek bore witness to its sorrow for the dying day.

'The weather was simply perfect. We anticipated a successful shearing. The mornings were crisp as lettuces, the succeeding portion of the day exhilarating to the degree of making conscious existence a pleasure of the highest order. Summer, with a register of 120 in the shade, would have been forgotten but for the dry harsh wool and the sand banks on the sheep's back. We were in high spirits nevertheless. If the wool was worth little we were separated by a thousand miles from our bills. Our bankers could only get at us by letter, and we were spared the discontent patent on the faces of those officials when the balance is on the wrong side of the ledger.

'By Jove, when I think of those early days, Sparks, how sanguine we must all have been to see anything but ruin, writ large, in such investments. The only sheep one could buy were very indifferent as to the quality, size, and constitution. They had been lambed twice a year for the purpose of stocking up new country, and it was chiefly on paper that the splendid frontages looked in any manner or shape tempting. The calculation had been based on Riverina scales of labour, outlay, and profit. Once on the ground the "dead horse" stood confessed. How often have you and I seen a healthy, high-couraged youngster start out for these fascinating territories of limitless mulga-downs, full-freighted with hope, flattery, coin, and courage—friendship, with delusive crayon, sketching golden

futures, cautious capital proffering loans with both hands. At the end of five years returns a subdued, bronzed, resolved-looking man, with signs of dust from the road of Time "upon brow and beard." His pecuniary correspondents, who, to say truth, have not come off scatheless, scowl upon him. But his "own people" and his true old friends receive the scarred and desert-worn Crusader with loving words and open arms. With these tarries he, till again the trumpet peals for another tilt with the veiled antagonist of the future.'

'Devilish fine, old man. You're a most sentimental buffer after the second tumbler. Can't be licked, in fact—but how about the nigger? I wonder you had the heart to shoot him—two poetical cusses like you and Lorton. Why didn't you give him a moral pocketankercher?'

'I appeal to Mr. Neuchamp for protection from your coarse attacks,' quoth Aymer with mock dignity. 'Perhaps, after all, this incident is of trifling interest.'

'My dear Mr. Brandon,' cried out Ernest, terrified at the idea of losing a tragedy, 'I sincerely trust that you will not think of withdrawing your promise to give us this deeply interesting tale. I feel painfully curious to hear the sequel.'

Thus adjured, and with a withering look at Parklands, Mr. Brandon proceeded.

'We devoted the next few days at Tthoondula to fixing the spade-press—that friendly adjunct to the pioneer-squatter's humble woolshed, and topping up the brush yard at the equally primitive washpool. I decided upon taking charge of the shed, leaving the lavatory to my partner.

'It would be difficult to choose the easier task. Will was to command a lot of half-tamed naked Myalls, as yet hardly to be trusted, reprisals being still freely indulged in on that frontier territory between the blacks and itinerant station hands. The shearers were composed of the human scum always to be found floating near the border of civilisation, like the rubbish forced before an advancing flood. It was no unusual occurrence to have the full complement of men in the morning, and in the afternoon, upon the unexpected arrival of an inspector of police, the shearing board would be deserted. All but a brace "cachéd" in the mulga. They showed up in the inverse proportion, of course, to the fact of their being "wanted." Not that the native police troubled themselves much about them. But a criminal hides from a policeman instinctively, as doth the young wood-duck from the sportsman. All this makes the management of this class of men the more difficult, as, if you sack them in your righteous wrath, you can by no possibility get others.'

'Cannot the blacks be taught to shear?' inquired Mr. Neuchamp. 'They are the natural labourers of the land—and *adscripti glebæ* too, as from what I learn they dare not leave their own district from fear of other tribes.'

'It is weary work shearing with them. They are neat but painfully slow, and constitutionally lazy. The Anglo-Saxon is made up of faults, not to say vices, but there is no worker on the earth's surface like him.'

'Can't be licked,' murmured Sparks contemplatively, removing his pipe and mixing himself another whisky. 'Tell me when you've finished shearing and want help to load up.'

'On the 19th,' continued Brandon calmly, all unheeding Mr. Parklands' practical arrangement of the narrative, 'all was ready. Will Lorton was to commence washing early next morning. They did not begin with the usual flock. But in that land "the most unaccustomed thing is custom."

'At the dawn-bird's cry from the aged trees, I sang out "All aboard!" and waking Will, we both rushed, robed in our blankets, to the lagoon, for a plunge into its sad-coloured waters, to emerge smoking in reactionary glow, and feeling fit to fight for a king's ransom.

'Then, habited in the primitive garb of the far north land, Will made for the blacks' camp, to see his Myalls off to the wash-pool.

'On Tthoondula dwelt a grizzled, savage-looking old warrior, called by the whites "Hutkeeper." His duty was to tend the home flock. He was a chief in his tribe, and did not render himself conspicuous by wearing clothes. The English language had proved too difficult for his limited intelligence. He received food and tobacco for his slight services.

'I had noticed one or two marked traits of savagery about Hutkeeper, and had warned Will not to trust the old ruffian. His mortal enemy at the home station was the cook, Nerangi Dick, whose prototype was Corney Delaney. Like him, he carried cynicism to its extreme limit. The likeness was so exact that it was currently reported that the devil, on one occasion, being short of a cook, had at sudden notice packed the original Corney back to earth from his comfortable corner near the furnace. The only billet he could retain was at the head station. He respected the master, and reserved his growls for the kitchen.

'The "boogil-colli" gins, water-carriers, had a rough time of it when Nerangi Dick reigned. He might be seen driving them to their duties, with many crisp oaths and a large stick. Of the male aboriginal he was even more intolerant. Ordered to feed the station blacks, he gave them their meat and damper as if throwing a bait to a dog. "Hutkeeper" rarely received his ration without being subsequently chased by Dick, armed with his broomstick. It reminded a Waverley student of Peter Peebles pursued by Nanty Ewart, or, more familiarly, of a sour-tempered Skye terrier pursuing a collie. Hutkeeper, on these occasions, keeping well out of reach, but looking back over his shoulder from time to time, with a scowl which had in it a deeper meaning than the acerbity of the other. Should

these two meet on the war-path, the devil would full surely recover his own.

'I told Lorton, after witnessing one of these periodical coursing matches, that Hutkeeper would make a bad enemy.'

'Take another tumbler, old man, after all that running,' suggested Parklands. 'I have had two sleeps and gone over all my stock bargains for the next three months since you commenced the life and times of that nigger. As a fictionist—historian, I mean—you can't be licked.'

'Mr. a—Sparks,' exclaimed Ernest, who had become confused between Parklands' real name and sobriquet, 'pray permit Mr. Brandon to conclude his deeply interesting tale. I wouldn't miss it for anything.'

Sparks murmured something about the Tract Society, and affected to compose himself to sleep. Brandon having compounded a restorative, then proceeded.

'When Will Lorton arrived at the camp day was just breaking. There were a dozen "goondies" to be visited, and the inmates started to their work. Each blackfellow, at the reveille, caught up a few waddies, and made tracks for the wash-pen, with his hands full of blazing mulga bark, waving about his body. Hutkeeper had been called, but to his surprise Will found, on passing his goondi a second time, that he had not gone with the others. Having a light switch in his hand, he thoughtlessly gave him an admonitory tap across his tattooed shoulders. Hutkeeper at once seized his nulla in one hand, stuck his tomahawk in his belt, his sole article of clothing, and made towards the washpool with his firebark in his left hand.

'Now Lorton, having finished his work at the camp, turned to walk back to breakfast. He had not gone a dozen paces when a crushing blow fell on the back of his head. He staggered forward, and turning received another, which laid open his head, and dropped him in his tracks. As he fell he saw Hutkeeper leap at him, with upraised tomahawk.

'What saved his life was this. Two or three blacks still in camp, having a wholesome fear of tribal expiation at the hands of the native troopers, seized the infuriated savage, and diverted the blows of his tomahawk. In the meanwhile Will Lorton, only temporarily "kilt," rose dizzily to his feet, and catching the foe a straight blow behind the ear, laid out that gentleman as neatly as if he had been dropped with his own weapon. He then threw himself upon the prostrate chieftain and wrested his arms from him. Before he could seize him, however, the slippery savage, eluding his grasp, was bounding through the trees, and soon after passed out of sight. Poor Will reached the home station covered with blood, and looking particularly faint.

'An angry man, ye may opine,
Was he, the proud Count Palatine,

which means that I, Aymer Brandon, was wroth exceedingly at this deed of blood (literally, indeed, the bright Norman blood of which Master Will was depleted on the occasion made a very pretty pool, artistically considered, on the earthen floor of his room). So "boot and saddle" was the order of the day.'

'Now we're coming to it,' exclaimed Mr. Parklands, in a tone of deep satisfaction. 'This is the sort of literature I go in for—incident, old man—lots of incident—eh, Mr. Neuchamp, isn't that your style? Now, why couldn't you have given us that first, old man, like this: "One fine morning, on the Paroo, Will Lorton went to the blacks' camp, didn't look behind him, and fell against a nulla, which happened to be up at the time."'

'You have no sentiment, Sparks, as I have always reminded you. What little humour you possess has been prematurely wasted on barmaids. You would enjoy a story about that old blue stag that nearly deprived you of a purchaser, just as much as Browning's last poem—more, in fact. But I have commenced this yarn, and you *must* and shall have it, if we sit up till daylight.'

'Only too happy, my dear f'ler,' murmured Sparks somnolently. 'Don't shoot me instead of that nigger. You seem to have been a rum lot out there, and old "Hutbuilder," as you call him, rather more of a gentleman than any of you. His manners rendered him unpopular, I suppose; and you trumped up this cock-and-bull story about Will just to suit the case for the Crown. Ah, Neuchamp, my boy, you have no idea how these benighted back-country squatters go on, when you and I are not there, and there is no one to check their violence.'

'About five minutes after Will was returned as "killed, wounded, and missing" from the wash-pen for the day, a black trooper rode in with a letter from his inspector, who was quartered about twenty miles from Tthoondula. Saddling up, and pressing Trooper Mayboy into the service, we galloped into the camp. He was armed with his carbine, and I with a very effective seven-shooter. I had long vowed never to draw a bead upon a blackfellow for anything less than bloodshed. But in my wrath I swore to shoot the old warrigal at sight, and in trifles I like to keep my word.

'In the camp reigned great excitement. His countrymen freely condemned Hutkeeper, and morally gave him up to justice.

"No good—Hutkeeper! Waddy-galo that fellow. Goondi-galo, goondi-galo mine. Baal waddy-galo."

'I wasted no time in the camp, but made a cast round, to pick up the tracks of the fugitive. Mayboy, eager as a bloodhound, was soon on the trail. On the soft soil of the Paroo it was not difficult to follow, with eyes like those of Mayboy.

'I said, "You think man him (catch), Hutkeeper?"

"Baal!" answered the trooper, "that fellow too much burri.

Bime-by marmy (officer) come up, and all about black trooper ; then man him, Hutkeeper ; mine think it shoot him !—Ki—i—i !”

‘The latter expression, long drawn out, was expressive of the high degree of satisfaction which that consummation would afford him and his brothers-in-arms. Having made sure of the direction of the tracks, Mayboy and I returned to the station. A messenger had long since been sent to Mr. Bothwell, the inspector, reporting the outrage, and asking for the prompt arrest of the offender. “Arrest or slay the Frank,” was old Lambro’s order ; “Catch the nigger, alive or dead,” was, in effect, the word of command when murder or wounding with intent was proved.

‘Within six hours after the commission of the offence Mr. Bothwell arrived with five highly efficient-looking troopers, making, with Mayboy, six in all.

‘Far finer specimens of the Australian aboriginal were they than their Paroo brethren. Recruited from the Wide Bay coast tribes, noted for warlike propensities, nothing delighted these human bloodhounds so much as being slipped to the blood-trail.

‘Shearing was postponed for two days to allow for the man hunt. After dinner the war party, consisting of Bothwell, myself, and the six troopers, saddled up and departed. We carried revolvers, the men carbines, throwing bullets of murderous size. Our janissaries were named respectively Mayboy, Tiger, Jerry, Bloomer, Tangerine, and Bulldog. Of these, Mayboy was Bothwell’s aide-de-camp and special favourite. The war-cry of “Hi, Mayboy !” was well known on the Paroo and Warrego. Something decisive generally followed that exclamation. Heaven help the poor wretch on whose footsteps these six bush devils were slipped. When the trail carried blood they were never known to fail or falter.

‘Put them to track cattle, horses, or sheep, and after half a day they began to grow weary or careless ; but with a human quarry ahead every eye was unerring, every muscle was tireless. Clue after clue was checked off with unvarying certainty, the result of human ingenuity allied with hereditary instinct unerring as that of the sleuth-hound.

‘Mayboy took the lead, laying the pack on at the exact spot where he had quitted the scent in the morning. For miles back from the Paroo the soil is composed of soft red loam, the tracks on which are as clear of imprint as fossils upon the old red sandstone. But once reach the arid flinty range, and its secrets of wayfaring man or beast are only revealed to the microscopic gaze of the Australian Indian. The troopers rode carelessly together while the footsteps of the fugitive were printed in large type, so to speak. Two kept slightly ahead, the rest following.’

Mr. Parklands aroused himself suddenly from a posture of

deep attraction or attention, and observed Ernest's eager countenance fixed upon Brandon's calm features, as he, recalling with a certain thrill of interest the stern episode of old pioneer life, told in his low, deep tones the tale of doom.

'Not caught him yet, old man?' demanded Mr. Parklands. 'Devilish slow work. If I'd old Ber-bar we'd have shot every blackfellow in the Paroo by this time. Couldn't lick him. You won't take any whisky—that's why your story hangs fire.'

'There is something deeply fascinating about a tale like this,' exclaimed Ernest. 'One does not often hear the tragedy from the mouth of one of the actors. I can imagine nothing more exciting than joining in such a chase. Of course you were able to take him alive, with your band of Mohicans. Uncas and old Hawkeye would not have been out of place in such a war-trail, had there only been a Mingo to the fore somehow.'

'I have the greatest respect for Uncas and Chingachgook; as for Hawkeye, I have honoured him from my youth up,' said Brandon; 'but I firmly believe that Tiger and Mayboy would have given both of them a wrinkle in tracking and woodcraft generally.'

'It was surmised that the trail would follow the river for about twenty-five miles, to a favourite camping-ground by the side of a deep lagoon, known as Tthulajerra. Mayboy, dropping alongside of Mr. Bothwell, said, "Marmy! mine think it, old man Hutkeeper, first time weja longa Tthulajerra, plenty blackfellow sit down there. That fellow messmate, then all-about pull-away long a scrub." This calculation was proved to be accurately correct, as the tracks ran straight to the lagoon, where a deserted but recently occupied camp was found. Smouldering fires, heaps of mussel-shells, and fishbones lay scattered around, while the stones in the native ovens were not yet cold.

'When Tthulajerra was reached it was nearly sunset; so a camp was organised for the night. Mr. Bothwell fully expected to run his quarry to earth before the next sunset. Unless Hutkeeper separated from the tribe they were sure of him. It was unlikely that the deer would leave the herd. Blacks prefer to fly and to fight in company; they dread solitary journeyings. Two camps were formed—one for Bothwell and myself; the other, at about fifty yards distant, for the troopers.

'That camp scene, before the moon rose, was one only to be found in a new land. The Paroo, unlike the Warrego, is not famed for heavy timber; still immense eucalypti border lagoons like the Tthulajerra. After our spare and simple meal I felt indisposed to sleep. I lighted my pipe, and, stretched on my rug, lay long in thought and reverie. The blazing camp fires illumined the silent giants of the wilderness from root to topmast branch. In the firelight the smooth white bark of the limbs and stem had a deathlike appearance, in keeping with the

gruesome feelings naturally engendered by a "man-hunt." I could scarcely restrain myself from peopling the ghastly outspread limbs with hundreds of victims. I thought I saw before me the African "death-tree," while the black figures of the naked troopers, flitting from fire to fire, favoured the illusion. They seemed to be awaiting the fall of the hideous fruit, and the furnishing forth of the feast. Mr. Bothwell, not being anything beyond a very practical and efficient Government officer, had gone to sleep. He was a good doer, and sleeping was no trouble to him. When the moon rose the morbid fancies were dispersed, and as the last dark form sank down seemingly into the earth I slept.

'After catching and destroying Hutkeeper about five hundred times, and being murdered by that relentless savage in every conceivable manner, I awoke, about 4 A.M., to find that a thick impenetrable fog lay nearly o'er "wood and wold." I replenished the dying fire, and not feeling inclined to sleep more, sat silent and brooding till the fog lifted, and one by one the shrouded forms came forth from the shadowy veil, like lost years through the mists of memory.'

'And yet people say there is no romance in a new country!' exclaimed Mr. Neuchamp, who, the best of created listeners, from his largely developed gift of sympathy, had eagerly drunk in every word, so manifestly enjoying the narration that Brandon, an imaginative and poetical though generally reserved man, had been unconsciously stimulated into a fuller development of the surroundings of his weird tale than under ordinary circumstances he would have thought possible. 'No poetry? No dramatic position? What a picture for an artist: a solitary figure in that gray silent dawn, by a dim smouldering fire; the careless savage troopers; the tranquil officer, calm but remorseless as a Roman centurion!'

Brandon continued, musingly—

'Tree after tree stands forth, slowly, as if painted by an invisible artist upon a canvas of mist. The foreground is quickly filled in. Small tumuli appear. The troopers swathed, all deathlike, in their blankets. Then a horse is traced on the murky easel; then another. Clink, clink, go the chains which fetter their feet.

"All aboard!" I shouted, at length casting away the phantasmal creation. "The busy babbling and remorseless day" is again born, for us and for all mankind, in this south land. Up spring the troopers. Bothwell arose, but kept his position until scorched out of it by the heaped-up fire. Breakfast was concluded, and the horses stood saddled and ready, as the sun rose.

'A different disposition of the forces was made for this day's work. The troopers separated into three pairs—Bulldog and Jerry followed the trail through all its deviations; Bloomer and Tangerine skirted on either flank, keeping about a hundred yards from the presumed line and the same distance ahead of

Bulldog and Jerry ; Mayboy and Tiger rode a quarter of a mile in advance of the party.

‘The system was this : The couple on the trail ensured its being neither lost nor overlooked ; the skitters, by riding straight on either side, picked up the tracks when any deviation was made. Whoever “cut” the trail whistled, when the other three quickly closed on him, and resumed their places from that point. The two in advance sought to cut the tracks some distance ahead ; when they did so a whistle, low but clear, brought those in the rear forward in a canter to start afresh from the new point. By this method of economising eyesight, as the signals followed each other in quick succession, the ground was covered much more quickly than if the trail had been traced through all its sinuosities.

‘The inspector and I followed at easy distance our sable sleuth-hounds—a pack without huntsman or whipper-in. They had this advantage over their canine comrades : their casts were made in advance. Was an unusually difficult tract of country encountered, where “scenting” was slow, the advance guard could ride beyond it, pick up the trail on more favourable ground and signal their comrades. Miles of rocky ridges were crossed, when the only guide to the silent avengers of blood was a stone turned over, the print of toe or heel on the scanty sand or gravel collected between the boulders. At times, merely a tiny white flake dropped from the fire-barks, carried in the coolimans to prevent the telltale fall of ashes, betrayed the pursued.

‘Still eager, tireless, almost joyous, rode forward the death-band on the faint footsteps of the hunted savage. “Hutkeeper,” thus fleeing, would surely know that he had staked his life, and lost it, when he permitted his wild nature to overcome him. He would know that many hours would not elapse before men of his own race would be on his trail—better trackers and more tireless than his tribe. But onward he fled, still ascending the range, knowing that the two ends of the trail were coming together only too surely. No white man can ever know what thoughts passed through the brain of the doomed old heathen during that long, hopeless flight.

‘If each individual man were not merely one of the units composing a vast system of usurpation, called from time immemorial by the specious name of Progress, one could afford to sympathise with the savage for smiting his oppressor. But the world will surely be *very* old when that most ancient of laws “the strongest shall possess,” ceases to have force. We preach the law of Right, but the older natural doctrine of Might has always prevailed and will find adherents to the end, so long as one man or one animal, brute or human, is born stronger than his fellow.

‘Thus, through the livelong sweet spring day, the sleuth-hounds swerved and faltered not. As the day wore on, the writing on Nature’s book, the ink whereof was the lifeblood of

him that fled, became easier to read. The sable coil seemed to work more unerringly than ever. It glided like a huge serpent among the trees, the head shooting forward to be swiftly and smoothly followed by the sinuous body.

"What do you think of the tracking?" asked Bothwell with pardonable pride, his eyes resting upon Mayboy, who was at that moment beating the covert of a close scrub, lifting his head from time to time like "questing hound."

"It is superb," I answered; "but, on my soul, Bothwell, I hope the old fellow will escape. According to his light, he but hit out like a man, and we are now treating him like a beast of prey. They must kill some one very near and dear to me, before I undertake a job of this kind again."

"We must either shoot them," said Bothwell, "or give up the land. Clear off the old and teach the young, is my motto at present."

"Yes," said I sadly, "another illustration of the 'fitness of things.' It would seem as if the present were perpetually to be damned for the benefit of the future. I should be sorry to have to explain to Hutkeeper's tribe, after we have killed him, the meaning of the words, 'If thine enemy smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the left also.'"

All the troopers were now seen to be clustered together. They were off their horses, smoking—a sure sign that they felt secure of their prey. When Bothwell and I joined them, Mayboy came forward dangling a small dilly-bag, dropped by one of the gins.

"Marmy! mine think it weja now; you make alight that one mountain, nerangi good way like it, ugh" (the guttural accompanied by the usual black's point, the protrusion of the under lip)—"that one Boolooloo water sit down. Blackfellow big one tired weja long a Boolooloo. To-night yan longa camp; boomalli (shoot, slay) Hutkeeper."

Boolooloo was a turreted hill, rising abruptly from the crown of the range, and towering far above it.

At its foot was a native well—a natural tank—scooped out of solid rock, gourd-shaped, with a small man-hole at the top. Its depth was, perhaps, twelve feet, with a diameter of double the extent. Its shaded position, under a ledge of overhanging rock, enabled it to contain water through any ordinary summer.

The rugged plateau of the summit of Boolooloo had been hollowed into caves from immemorial time, favoured retreats of the wild tribes in its vicinity. It wanted now an hour to sundown, the hill was then three miles distant.

Bothwell's order was to wait until nightfall, then to surprise the camp and to arrest Hutkeeper, with the usual alternative if he evaded or resisted the capture. He promised me that, if possible, he should be taken alive. Sudden vengeance having been denied me, I was far from keen for the old pagan's blood. Bothwell could have told me that Hutkeeper's last sun was setting.

'The troopers, deciding to stalk the bush on foot, took off their superfluous clothing, also their boots, slinging their ammunition pouches over their shoulders. The horses, unsaddled and close hobbled, were turned loose. Then all awaited the close of day. Supper was postponed till after the invasion of the camp, as a fire would have betrayed our vicinity. The troopers, light-hearted and free from anxiety, a complaint chiefly confined to the white man, passed away the time card-playing. Their officer and I sat silently on the short turf, watching the shadows of the gydia trees lengthen, ah! so slowly. The sun was fading over the northern turrets of Boolooloo, lighting them into elfin splendour, as might gleam the battlements of a ruined castle. A fast-gloomng shadow crept around the mountain, until at length its huge mass was hidden from the watchers.

'The light of day had departed. The hour was come. The last act of the tragedy was about to commence.

'The troopers put up their cards, lifted their carbines, and passed shadow-like and silently through the trees. We followed. In an hour we reached the base of Boolooloo.

'Mayboy halted and whispered to his chief, "Marmy! close up to camp now, drekaly see fire longa nother one side." The wind sighed from the hill top *towards* us. There was therefore no danger of the sharp-eared blacks' dogs giving tongue in time to warn them. Then all crawled noiselessly up the steep sides of Boolooloo, pausing when about a hundred yards from the camp. Fires were smouldering in front of the caves, but not a creature was visible. We moved cautiously forward. Then a dog raised a dismal howl, and was joined in full chorus by his comrades.

'In the middle of this mournful music the troopers bounded into the camp, scattering the dogs into the crevices of the rocks. The next moment a yell of terror and despair burst from the wretched blacks, who came rolling out of the caves, and, huddled together in groups, they wailed out, "Goondi galo (tame blacks), goondi galo," incessantly.

'Then from the centre cave leaped forth a hideous demoniac figure, ghastly with white and red pigment. "Hutkeeper! Hutkeeper!" shouted the troopers. "Look out, Marmy! that one big one coola (angry, fierce)." By the dim starlight I was enabled to recognise my late shepherd transformed into a warrior, prepared to meet his enemies fairly and to the death. The old savage held before him his file-shaped shield. In his belt hung the nulla and tomahawk; while his right hand held aloft a battle-spear, poised and quivering.

'For one moment—his last—he stood with blazing eye and wolfish gaze upon the foe, a true warrior of the waste, then hurled his spear into the centre of the party. The quivering rifled weapon, speeding through the air like a cloth-yard shaft, grazed the cheek of Mayboy, and by a hairbreadth only missed the somewhat solid proportions of Bothwell. Six carbines rang

out in answering volley, and, leaping into the air, Hutkeeper fell forward on his face, a dead man.

‘Our work was finished. Civilisation had been vindicated. The whole party silently retreated, leaving the sad tribe alone with their dead. Will the caverns be haunted, in days to come, by a spirit that cannot be laid by the white man’s bullet? When I returned to Tthoondula, I thus addressed my partner, “Well, old boy, I can see that man-hunting is not much in my line. You’ll oblige me greatly by killing your own nigger next time.”’

“The forest laws are sharp and stern,” quoted Ernest, as the tale and the life of the sullen son of the soil came to an end simultaneously. ‘I suppose there is a necessity for prompt punishment of violence in a frontier settlement; but it seems rather hard on the poor old fellow. How does the law of England stand?’

‘Well, of course,’ said Brandon, ‘it was strictly legal to endeavour to arrest either an aboriginal or a white man upon the charge of “cutting and wounding with intent to kill,” or even “to do grievous bodily harm.” If such a prisoner resisted the police, they were authorised to fire upon him. In this case, it was impossible to take him alive. However that may be, he paid in full of all demands for his crime. I fancy we may as well turn in.’

‘So the nigger is dead at last!’ exclaimed the awakening Parklands. ‘Good-bye, Neuchamp; you may not be up when I start. Aymer, your story is really grand. Too short, if anything. You don’t know a little more, just to top up with? The worst of these interesting yarns, they keep you awake so. If I am late at starting to-morrow, it might be a loss of five hundred pounds to me—you wouldn’t like me to send in a bill for half. Why don’t I go to bed now? I feel too much excited. Besides, I am afraid I missed some. You wouldn’t mind beginning again? Well, sir, I’m off now. Never mind throwing a boot at me—one of your boots is no joke, remember. But look here—if it takes three hours to kill one blackfellow, how long—’

Here Mr. Parklands disappeared suddenly, simultaneously with the evolution of a missile of some sort discharged wrathfully by the narrator.

Mr. Neuchamp also departed, and being rather tired slept until past sunrise. When he came forth only Brandon was visible, who told him that Parklands had left at dawn, and was now many a mile on his way.

CHAPTER XVIII

MR. NEUCHAMP of Rainbar had now reached a very important position in his career. He had gained a fulcrum for that lever by the aid of which he trusted to move the Australian world. To raise or to cause to tremble—and finally to impel upon the incline of undoubted and social improvement, the hitherto inanimate mass of colonial society, strong in the *vis inertie* which rules primitive or unenlightened communities. Before this happy moment of proprietorship he could but enunciate principles and theories. Now he was enabled to demonstrate them by practice. He would have comrades, neighbours, dependents, workmen of his own. And concurrently with the most effective and successful working of the station, he would show New South Wales, Australia, and the world generally what an Englishman of culture, with a purpose, could effect in the way of reform. Captain Cook had discovered the continent, pro-consuls of greater or less intelligence had governed it. It was left for him, Ernest Neuchamp, to raise it to that point of social and industrial eminence which should make it a Pharos, a wonder-sign, an exemplar throughout all the civilised world.

It may be gathered that Mr. Neuchamp was alone and possessed his soul in peace, when he found sufficient time in which to indulge these grand ideas and magniloquent reflections. Mr. Parklands' company was not favourable to contemplation. His very existence was an aggressively energetic fact, wholly adverse to reverie or mental repose of any description. He was always talking or smoking, or asserting or denying, or going out or coming in, or preparing for his next journey or reviewing his last one. His very correspondence was of a telegraphic and restless nature, full of reference to distances and routes, orders to overseers and stockmen to go thither, or come hither, to await him at one place or meet him at another. He went to bed defiantly and got up noisily, full of plans and prospects, and requiring everybody to arise and be stirring, in the most literal sense.

Aymer Brandon was constitutionally of a calm, equable, and chiefly amiable temperament, provided that he had things

mostly his own way. But he was temporarily excited by the demon of unrest which abode in Parklands, so that between practical jokes, contradictions, reminiscences of adventures, revelries, and the like, no peace, in the true sense of the word, was possible until their departure from Rainbar.

Not until several days after that event did Mr. Neuchamp realise that he was clothed with real and undisputed sovereignty.

Then with sudden afflatus arose in his brooding mind the thought of the elevated duties and deep responsibility of his position. It was the hour of the evening meal. This frugal meal—damper, hard corned beef, and very black astringent tea—the same served in a very black quart pot—Ernest had enjoyed in solitude. Humble as was the fare, it was amply sufficient for a man in the pride of vigorous youth. The indifferent Bohea had power to stimulate delicately, yet positively, the nerves of Mr. Neuchamp's, perhaps, hyper-sensitive brain.

The night was calm and clear. The starry heavens held no cloud. The long lagoon lay darkly metallic, or broke into phosphoric ripples. The mysterious sounds of the desert were rare and as yet unfamiliar to the listener. All things afforded a startling contrast to his English name and surroundings, even to his later metropolitan habitudes. Yet as he sat there by the light of the stars, amid the tremendous solitude of the wilderness, his heart swelled with the thought that he was the virtual ruler of a territory larger than his ancestral country—larger than any member of the house of Neuchamp had owned since the first baronial fiefs in their blood-bought Normandy.

‘What are the chief and foremost needs of this waste empire of mine—this desert city?’ soliloquised he. ‘Here I have land enough to satisfy the earth hunger of the most ravenous aspirant of *la terre*. Water in reasonable though perhaps insufficient quantity. What is the great absent factor? Population, a yeoman class, a race of Vavasours, who could use these great levels for the growth of certain semi-tropical crops, who might rear upon them a limited number of stock, who would secure homes for themselves and food for their working oxen; who would remain loyal to me, their powerful yet philosophic ally; who would work for me at reasonable rates at ordinary station work, or any reproductive improvements which I might suggest, and who would thus entirely sweep away the present undesirable relations which have hitherto subsisted between Australian country labourers and their employers. It would not be expensive to provide a school and a teacher for their children, to be paid by results. I should be enabled, by a steady supply of labour, to cultivate a reasonable area. Gardens and experimental industries would of course spring up. The carrying capabilities of Rainbar might be enormously increased by cutting a narrow canal, as Parklands suggested, between the waters of the river and the chain of deep, yet dry

lakes at the back of the run. The advantages of labour on one side, of wages on the other, would be mutual. Simultaneously an improvement in the character and quality of the herd would take place. Scientific experiments might be regularly made and recorded as to rainfall and other important matters. The culture of the vine, the orange, even the silkworm, might be introduced; and finally, after a few years, the semi-coöperative community at Rainbar, self-contained, happy, and prosperous, might be pointed out, as at least *one* instance where enlightened theory and successful practice had accomplished an advance in civilisation, had solved the problem of the harmonious interchange of labour and capital, and had interpolated at least one Arcadian chapter in the sad history of mankind.'

As these and other fair and fascinating trains of ideas passed through the mind of Ernest Neuchamp—while outside of his lonely and humble dwelling the silent stars burned in the still wondrous firmament, and nought but the monotonous and half-boding sound of the night-bird broke the profound primeval silence—he passed instinctively from the stage of triumphant justification of his plans to a half-felt distrust as to their practicability; and with the thought of failure came a vision of the calm questioning gaze of Antonia Frankston, before which his ardent scheme and aspirations for the perfectibility of the race had more than once appeared dreamy and Quixotic. The fancied questioning of old Paul, cool as kindly, yet keen as a cross-examiner, seemed adverse to the Utopian infant. But Ernest's strong enthusiasm of humanity, his generally sanguine temperament, carried him for that night over all obstacles, and he retired to a *very* lowly couch, fully determined that the Rainbar community should enjoy every advantage which co-operative life and labour had ever yielded to intelligent guidance.

With regard to the ordinary working of the station, he felt at a disadvantage in the absence of Jack Windsor. He had been so much in the habit of relying upon that ready-witted and helpful personage in the executive department, that he felt comparatively helpless when solely responsible. He considered also that his life would be now almost unendurably solitary without the companionship of some one nearly approaching his own grade, who would be at once an assistant and a companion.

In this extremity, he bethought himself of his late associates at Garrandilla. None of these young gentlemen was absolutely necessary at that ovine university. They had taken their degrees, so to speak. Their places were perhaps waiting to be filled by other alumni, some of whom paid a fair sum for the privilege of fulfilling, very literally, the position of the subordinates of Jairus, to that rather exacting centurion Mr. Doubletides.

This point being settled, he essayed to make choice of a probable companion. Grahame was obviously devoted to sheep.

The merino had 'marked him for his own,' and it would have been wrong to have withdrawn so promising a woolsorter from the establishment. Moreover, he was not interesting or sympathetic as a companion.

Fitzgerald Barrington was interesting and amusing, if not sympathetic. Mr. Neuchamp was much minded to invite him to Rainbar. But, in his way, he was as unlikely as Grahame to take himself to any scheme for the improvement of the common people. With all the *bonhomie* of his country, he despised and disbelieved in the people, and would not have put forth his hand to save them from a fate quite commensurate with their deserts.

The remaining cadet then was Charley Banks. In this youngster Ernest had always recognised a manly and self-reliant nature, by no means beneficially indebted to early training and having come off indifferently in the matter of book learning. Still he thought him improvable from certain indications which led him to think him not wholly unsuitable as a companion. He had often expressed his dislike to sheep and his anxiety to live on a cattle station. Mr. Neuchamp, finally coming to the conclusion that he might do the boy a service, and at the same time provide himself with a companion in his solitude, wrote a letter to Mr. Jedwood, in which he described his purchase and gave a short sketch of the capabilities of the run, winding up with a fair offer of employment for Mr. Banks if he had no objection to his leaving Garrandilla, and if the youngster himself cared to come.

He was not long left in suspense concerning the intentions of Charley Banks. He received, as soon as the somewhat indifferent postal arrangements permitted, a letter from Jedwood, informing him that he was heartily welcome both to Mr. Banks and to Mr. Fitzgerald Barrington, if it pleased him to take a brace of cadets. But that, perhaps, it would be safer and more profitable to take one, who could do more work and be less trouble (on the well-known principle of two boys being only equal to half a boy) than a couple.

From Charley Banks himself he received a short but enthusiastic letter, setting forth his gratitude for being remembered by him, and his intention of starting for Rainbar in company with Jack Windsor, who, it was reported, was on the road up from town, and not very far from Garrandilla at the date of writing.

Much pleased with the idea of having shortly the companionship of Mr. Banks, and the aid of Jack Windsor, upon whose ready and practical counsel he had learned to place a high value, Mr. Neuchamp, after a few purposeless rides round his territory, conceived the bold idea of mustering and drafting a portion of the herd, with the aid of the aborigines whom Mr. Parklands had bequeathed to him. A general muster he of course knew that, without a considerable force of volunteer

assistants, he was powerless to undertake. But a portion of the herd he thought he could get in. 'It will familiarise them with going through the yards,' said he to himself, 'and if there are any calves to put the new brand on, we can manage *them*.' Like most inexperienced purchasers, he had immediately changed the LP brand, known from Queensland to Adelaide, to one of his own invention, viz. $\overline{\text{PNE}}$ (a conjoined hieroglyph), which, as combining the initials of his Christian name and surname with the second letter of the latter, he thought ingenious and attractive, whereas, in point of fact, it took years to gain the widespread association with Rainbar which the old brand already possessed.

During former musters Mr. Neuchamp's constructive faculties had been busy with projects for improving the accepted mode of drafting cattle. Much to his own satisfaction, he had arranged his system beforehand. He was confident that it would work without a hitch. His humane tendencies had been outraged by the unsparing use of the ruthless stockwhip, keenest when unheard, as well as of the long, pliant, wattle-drafting stick, not apparently a weapon upon which to depend your life, but in skilful hands—and such are not wanting at every important muster—sufficient to drop, as by a thunderbolt, the most formidable beast. This Mr. Neuchamp had remarked with pain and displeasure. Hitherto he had seen in drafting-yards only men used to managing breeding cattle, among which the calf of a week old, given to stagger wildly between your legs, and the wary and still more dangerously sudden 'Micky,' a two-year-old bull. Thus, to his eye, cattle drafting was less a difficult art than one which could obviously be conducted on a more æsthetic basis.

That portion of the Rainbar herd which Mr. Neuchamp inveigled into the stockyard, then and there, with the assistance of the black boys, consisted almost wholly of the well-bred station 'crawlers,' as the stockmen term them from their peaceable and orderly habits. These guileless animals he managed, with but slight driving, to impel into the large receiving yards.

Beyond gazing with mild disapprobation on this proceeding they entered no protest. Indeed, when once in the yard, upon seeing the rails put up, they had all lain down and commenced the pleasing and reflective task of rumination. They had evidently made up their minds to a day's 'post and rails'—a matter to be borne with educated bovine philosophy.

Mr. Neuchamp then armed himself and black boys with light hunting crops having slender thongs. With these merely suggestive scourges they did not find it difficult to urge the indifferent animals into the smaller forcing-yards. Having got thus far, switches which would sting but not bruise were substituted. These seemed sufficiently intimidating to cause the steady steers and mild old cows to stroll calmly into the drafting lane.

So far the unsophisticated heathen, though wondering much

at the manifold precautions taken with station pets, carried out all orders, in momentary expectation of some miracle being performed. That consummation being slow of arriving, Piambook protested, 'Mine thinkit pyam nerangi fellow carp now,' head and pluck standing out in bold relief in his mind's eye as he made the suggestion.

'Open that gate, Piambook,' said Ernest gravely, pointing to the one which led into the 'run-about' yard. Piambook, snuffed out, obeyed, and wonderingly observed his master switch beast after beast into the various receptacles for cattle beyond. They were then released into the bush. Upon regaining their liberty, after an inquiring backward gaze, as who should say, 'Is that all?' they lay down a few yards from the slip-rails and gravely ruminated, much wondering, doubtless, at this, to them, wholly unprecedented experience. That night in camp Piambook remarked to Mrs. P., before coiling under his blanket, 'Mine thinkit Mister Noojim wompi-wompi long a cobbra.'

Ernest came to the conclusion that man was not born to live alone, in a gradual, leisurely, and very decided manner, before he was gladdened one day by the arrival of Mr. Charley Banks, accompanied, to his further satisfaction, by Jack Windsor.

'The old woman had got all right, bless her heart,' Jack explained, 'and he had come up in hot haste, after he had heard Mr. Neuchamp had bought Rainbar. He found, when as far on his road as Garrandilla, that Mr. Banks was just starting, so they had joyfully joined company.'

Charley Banks was of opinion that he had got to the right shop at last. 'Everybody he had heard speak of the run had said,' he informed Ernest, 'that Rainbar was an out-and-out fattening run; that it was not half stocked; that the cattle were mostly very good, except a lot out at the Back Lake, and the best thing he could do was to clear them off for pigmeaters. The Mildool people were sending off a mob next week, and they would take all there were at Rainbar of the same description, and share expenses.'

'Pigmeaters!' exclaimed Ernest; 'what kind of cattle do you call those? Do bullocks eat pigs in this country?'

'No, but pigs eat them, and horses too,' affirmed Jack Windsor; 'and a very good way of getting rid of rubbish; all that's a turn too good for making slaughter-yard bacon, does for the Chinamen; they ain't over particular.'

'Oh! that's it,' said Mr. Neuchamp, reassured; 'but what price will such cattle fetch?'

'Thirty shillings to two pounds, and well sold at that,' said Jack.

'But would they not fatten, with time and careful management?' inquired Ernest, loath to lose his probable profits.

'Wouldn't fatten in a hundred years; not in a lucerne paddock, not if you poured melted fat down their throats!'

They're mostly old savage devils, all horn and hide ; only fit for killing people and spoiling the rest of the herd. Now's a first-rate chance to get 'em away with the Mildool lot to Melbourne.'

Charley Banks followed on the same side, observing that the cattle referred to were thoroughly bad and unprofitable animals to keep or feed, and the sooner they were off the run and sold at however small a price the better. 'But I suppose you got something allowed in the price for them, didn't you, by Mr. Parklands?'

Ernest now recollected that this must have been the particular denomination alluded to by Aymer Brandon as those Back Lake 'ragers,' and in reference to which he had calmly decided to knock off a hundred and fifty pounds from the amount of the purchase-money.

'Oh yes, I remember now,' he said. 'I suppose I can afford to sell them at a moderate price.'

It was finally arranged that Jack Windsor should go on the next day to their neighbours at Mildool, and induce them to come to in force with all their available hands, as soon as they had mustered their own outlaws, to help them to get in and draft the Back Lake mob.

'I don't apprehend that they will be so very difficult to manage,' said Mr. Neuchamp, with a modest but slightly experienced air. 'That is, if they are taken quietly. I put through a good-sized lot of cattle a few days since, and had only Piambook and Boinmaroo with a hunting-crop each.'

Mr. Windsor and Charley Banks looked meaningly at each other. The slightest approach to a contraction might have been observed in the former's left eye as he made answer—

'There's cattle and cattle, sir. I don't think we had any regular out-and-outers at Garrandilla when we used to go and spend a week with old Mr. Hasbene. He told me to give you his best wishes most particular. But they say these Back Lakers has been, in a manner of speaking, neglected. Mr. Parklands was always scraping the run bare as he could for fat stock, and let these old guns have their fling till he'd got time to make up a mob and clear 'em all out. But he is a gentleman as never has a minute to spare ; always comin' up without notice, and rushin' off as if another day at home would ruin him out and out, so they all say, and the long and the short of it is, it's fell upon us to make a clean sweep of 'em—and a tidy job it is. However, there's some smart boys from up the river, at Mildool now, and I think we can't have a better chance to tackle 'em. Isn't that so, Mr. Banks?'

Mr. Banks nodded, and Mr. Neuchamp having signified approval, Jack Windsor was accredited as plenipotentiary for the Mildool embassy, and the council terminated.

The improvements were not extensive at Rainbar, Mr. Parklands being a foe to station expenditure, except where horses and traps were concerned. In outlay for these necessities of

life, as he called them, his enemies asserted that he spent a small fortune annually. Certainly his travelling arrangements needed to be complete. He was continually on the road. He accomplished wonderful distances, and when once he had made an appointment, whatever the weather, the roads, the season, or the pastime, men knew that they could depend upon him to keep his tryst to the day, almost to the hour.

Alike to him were tide or time,
Moonless midnight or matin prime,

and he had hitherto been extremely lucky, whether from his deep-seated determination 'not to be licked,' or from other interested quarters, so that one of his admirers went so far as to say that if he had been due at St. Thomas's the day after that historic island had been submerged, 'and a gull above it flying,' Parklands would have been desried sailing about in a cutter, searching sanguinely for his I. P., and defying the elements with his customary formula.

Still, though he abstained from fencing, and did not greatly see the use of dwellings in the bush, where a blackfellow was an inexpensive and efficient substitute for one and a few sheets of bark for the other, he had so far relaxed his austere notions of outlay at Rainbar as to sanction the erection of two huts and a large, strong, well-planned stockyard. Of these improvements he had boasted on the journey to such an extent that Ernest half expected a modified Swiss chalet and a stockyard like that of the municipal cattle-yards in Melbourne, of which he had seen a photo. Aymer Brandon laughed at his grand description, declining to expect anything but a couple of broken-backed humpies; and as for the cattle-yard, he assured Ernest that at the last muster he attended at Rainbar they carried a lot of posts and rails out to the Back Lake in drays, put them up temporarily, mustered the fat cattle adjacent, *by moonlight*, and brought the posts and rails back with them after they had served their turn. Then Sparks emitted divers scintillations, and finally became sulky, and declined further conversation.

However, the huts turned out to be weather-proof and substantial, as huts go, and the stockyard, if not macadamised like the Melbourne Stock Exchange, or covering thirty-six acres like its Chicago cousin, was yet a roomy and many-gated enclosure, equal to the working of twice as many head of cattle as Rainbar at this time boasted.

Mr. Windsor was therefore enabled to take up his abode with the hut-keeper in the edifice which did duty for kitchen and men's hut, while Mr. Banks secured a second bedroom in the other one with the proprietor, and professed himself to be snugly lodged. That young gentleman confided to Ernest his extreme gratification at finding himself permanently located at a 'real first-class, fattening, plains-country cattle station'; such

an establishment, since his entrance into regular employment, having been his ideal location.

'Not a sheep near the place or likely to be for years,' he remarked exultingly—'that's what I like about it; all good right-down cattle work to look forward to: drafting, branding, camping, and, I suppose, driving the fat cattle to Melbourne some day—won't that be jolly? As for sheep, I'm sick of the very sound of the name. When your work's done with cattle, it's done; but with sheep it never stops—winter and summer—all the year round.'

'Well, I must say I share your views about sheep, Charley,' said Mr. Neuchamp; 'it's the most unending grind that I know. Cattle work has the advantage of being more romantic and exciting when you are engaged in it, and of coming to a definite conclusion some time or other, when you can refresh your wearied senses. In the meantime we are not over supplied with resources at Rainbar, as yet. I have sent for some books and ordered the weekly papers. Until they arrive, I shall be rather hard-set, especially in the evenings.'

The intervening days were got over without any great difficulty, chiefly by means of a series of exploratory rides round the run, up and down the river; these last excursions offering the variety of a little shooting, a double-barrelled gun being among the valuables left by Mr. Parklands, and 'given in,' upon the delivery of the place.

One evening brought a black boy from Mildool with a message that their muster was done, and that they would bring over the 'pigmeaters' they had gathered, and would muster the Back Lake cattle next day if Mr. Neuchamp would meet them there next morning.

Charley Banks was much excited at the news. 'You will see some riding now, and some drafting too, if the cattle are wild. All the best stockmen on the river, both up and down, were to be at Mildool this muster. There are some smart boys, I expect.'

On the following morning Mr. Neuchamp and his friend were astir long before daylight, and soon after sunrise were well on their way to the Back Lake, full of expectation.

Nor was the scene when they reached the lonely lake, with the aid of Piambook's guidance, other than novel to Ernest's partially-instructed vision.

The Back Lake was a grand-looking sheet of fresh water, covered with wild fowl, a thin fringe of timber surrounding its margin. On a promontory which ran into the lake for some distance was a camp, bare and stripped of herbage to an extent which denoted long and constant usage. Skeletons of cattle here and there showed where the rifle had been at work from time to time, the formidable horns which still abounded hinting that abnormal causes had been at work to bring about a state of survival of the fittest.

On the camp stood, or traversed in angry circles, about a thousand head of very mixed cattle, in every sense of the word, a number of grand animals in magnificent condition, mingled with others that the most inexperienced eye could observe to be 'stale, flat, and unprofitable,' except for the very exceptional market and destination previously referred to.

At the distance of a couple of hundred yards from the main body stood the smaller lot, some four or five hundred, which the stock-riding contingent had evidently brought with them. Some were guarding them. Some restrained the camp cattle from leaving their parade ground. Others, among whom Ernest recognised Jack Windsor, were riding in pairs, and separating or 'cutting out,' as the cattle station phrase is, divers excited animals of a fierce countenance from the herd, and guiding them into the smaller division, with which once associated, they were by the guardians thereof prevented from leaving.

Mr. Neuchamp's artistic mind was strongly impressed with the wild picturesque character of the scene. On every side the vast plain stretched unbrokenly as the sea. The score of stockmen, swarthy, bearded, carelessly if not wildly attired, bore in looks, and perhaps in some other respects, no slight resemblance to a party of Apaches or Comanches, the 'Horse Indians' of South-Western America. They were well mounted for the most part on splendidly-conditioned animals, for no living steeds enjoy richer pasture and purer air than those which range the great saltbush levels of the interior; and generally the riding was more lavish, and indeed reckless as to pace and danger, than those of any previous bushmen.

'There goes "Desborough's Joe," the best stockman on the river,' said Charley Banks admiringly. 'Him on the roan horse,' pointing to a slight black-bearded man on a magnificent roan horse, who, having forced an immense black bullock out of the camp, was racing neck-and-neck with him, as he tried to break back, and as he 'blocked' the fierce beast at every frantic effort to double and rejoin his comrades, 'dropping' the terrific sixteen-foot stockwhip on face or flank with terrific emphasis. 'That half-caste boy is a rum one too. By George, he nearly jumped his horse on to that last bullock's back, when he got him headed straight for the cut-out cattle. There's Jack Windsor coming! they're going to knock off for a bit.'

Mr. Windsor came over to explain to his master that he had remained at Mildool to give his assistance until their muster was finished, in accordance with use and custom; the head stockman there covenanting as soon as the fat cattle had been sent off to come over, bringing his pigmeaters, and also his following of fellow-stockmen, to give the Rainbar folks a turn, and draft their 'Roosians' for them.

'So, as they was a very smart lot of coves as ever I see, sir,' pursued Mr. Windsor, 'I didn't think as we could do better than get 'em all over here and skin the Back Lake camp of all

the out-and-outers. We might never have such another chance for no one knows when. If you and Mr. Banks will come down to the camp, you'll see the sort I'm having cut out, and a livelier lot of "ragers" I haven't seen for many a day; not since I was at Mr. Selmore's Mallee Meadows. There's only about three hundred of these, and not another on the run. But I'm blessed if *he'd* got anything else—wonderful man, Mr. Selmore!

Ernest accompanied his followers to the camp, where Banks pointed out the types which all cattleholders agree in desiring to 'get shut of,' in Jack's phrase, as soon as possible. After a short interval for refreshment, the stockmen, who had been in the saddle before dawn, recommenced cutting out, which tolerably violent exercise was only concluded at sunset. The moon being favourable, the whole band then closed in upon the *enfants trouvés*, leaving the camp cattle to go whither they listed. At some time in the night, after a tedious drive of many hours, the ample outer yards at Rainbar, with much shouting and whip volleys, received them, and the gates being *very* carefully secured, all further operations were adjourned to the morrow.

Early on the following morning Mr. Neuchamp betook himself to the yard, nervously anxious for a sight of the prey, so safely deposited there, in the uncertain light and misleading shadows of the midnight hour. The *coup-d'œil* is uncommon, wellnigh unique.

About seven hundred ultra-Bohemian bullocks, whose bodies appear to be mere appendages to their terrific horns, are safely (for themselves) yarded, many of them for the first time for the preceding ten years.

The trained bushman of Australia knows that yarding these inexpressible pariahs simply amounts to arming them for the fray. The resources, in attack or defence, developed in the confirmed 'rager,' are only to be learned by experience. He is the grizzly bear of Australia, and with a slight shade of odds should be my horse in a fight with that terrible plantigrade.

Mr. Neuchamp had looked forward to an exciting, perhaps dangerous encounter when they reached the station yards. But with this class of 'shorthorn' yarding is a much more rapid affair than with quiet station-bred cattle, which delay and resist with contemptuous disapproval born of familiarity. In such a case as the present the leaders, if not bent on flight, dash through the widely-opened gateways into the yard like soldiers storming a fort. The rest clear out with equal celerity.

If not frustrated in his first attempt at breaking back, by the sabre stroke of a sixteen-foot stockwhip dropped fair between the eyes by a cabbage-tree-hatted, black, velvet-banded native, the 'rager' cuts through the opposing ranks like a dragoon through Chinese infantry. No one goes after him. Perhaps five years afterwards, at another grand battue, a black boy will remark, pointing to an old broken-winded, but indomitable

warrior, with horns like scythe-blades, 'You menalu that fella? close up that fella boomalli yarraman belongi to me, long a Mr. Levison, old man muster long a Boocalthra Lake.' The 'rager' is old, weak, and crippled now. The time has passed when he could tread the war-path alone. He will not leave his comrades now. He labours along painfully, but on the grand old visage is stamped indelibly the 'hall-mark' of courage, the possession of which he shares with the monarchs of mortality. Doubt not that he will reach the yard, and in that enclosure defy menaces, shouts, blows from the unerring waddy, from the stockman's fire-tailed whips. He passes for the last time into what is now his graveyard. He will never leave it alive. At shut of day eight of his enslaved brethren drag him forth to the little spot of earth, his—what say I?—our only true heritage. Nature raises him a not ungraceful mausoleum of marsh-mallow. Farewell they of the unstoried herd! Like him, all unknowing of the base pangs of fear—like him, sped with a bullet through his brain, the only true death for a hero!

After the pleasant relaxation of breakfast, one of the few comparatively civilised meals encountered during the last fortnight, pipes were lit, stockwhips greased and garnished with resplendent crackers, and all hands strolled in leisurely fashion towards the stockyard. This enclosure presented on approach a tossing sea, 'a vision of horns,' most literally. Had there been a particle of unanimity among the imprisoned criminals, desperate and accursed in the eyes of man, a whole side of the yard might easily have been carried away upon their united horns, but they were too busy with wars of reprisal.

Unable to vent their rage on the common enemy, they rushed, gored, trampled, and bruised one another. Hair, hide, blood, and dust were the staples in present request. The weakest went to the wall, metaphorically, each individual under the average standard of strength and ferocity faring like an unwary O'Hallaghan discovered at a fair composed of O'Callaghans.

The correct thing, on first arriving at a drafting yard, is to 'cockatoo,' or sit on the rails, high above the tossing horn-billows, and discuss the never-ending subject of hoof and horn.

Many of the captive 'ragers' had personal histories. Heroes of many a camp, they had gradually been driven back to the outside boundaries of their respective runs, and though, each of fattening qualities and contumacious conduct, finally outlawed. The cattle-brand of Cain was now affixed to them. Sentenced and finally doomed to the unprejudiced stomachs of Chinamen for a consideration of thirty shillings per head, horns given in.

Presently Piambook and Boinmaroo appear carrying bundles of carefully-selected drafting sticks. Each stockman picks his favourite weapon, trying its poise and touch, like a billiard cue, and deciding with much care and deliberation. The ends are

whittled to prevent splitting; passes and blows are made at imaginary foes. This part of the preparation does not last long. No mistakes are made. The cool, quiet-eyed youngsters know their weapon well, and the delicate and responsible work required of it. A desultory entry into the receiving-yard then takes place, each man picking his own panel.

The 'ragers' observing this movement keep wildly and excitedly 'ringing,' like a first-class Maelstrom. As a matter of taste and safety, the original circular-sailing abyss would seem to be preferable. Some one *did* come out of that alive, *crede* Edgar Allan Poe. But no human 'hide or hair' would have emerged (unmanufactured) from the 'horn-mill' we have faintly essayed to limn.

The practised stockriders, keeping an eye on the trampling multitude, now glide down on either side of the yard, thereby preventing a simultaneous rush at the fence, which, though of unusual massiveness, is barely up to the weight of six hundred bullocks, say three hundred tons, at a high degree of momentum.

There is no question of charging as yet. Matters have not reached the personal stage between the combatants. If the 'ring' crowds too near the fence, the men on that side would walk along the middle rail holding on the while by the 'cap,' or uppermost horizontal, always of rounded and not of split timber like the lower bars. If a bullock looks at any one 'in that tone of voice,' he receives an admonitory tap on the nose. But the blood of the 'ragers' is not yet hot enough for the desperate stage when they dare everything. So they merely acknowledge the blow by a savage dig into their nearest comrade's ribs.

Suddenly a bullock quits the outer edge at full speed, and dashes at the yard. The herd burst after him like a charge of Cossacks. As if by magic, the stockmen form in line, and without a word of warning or command each man stands in his proper place. An advance in line is made upon the flying squadron. Yells, oaths, sticks, and lumps of clay are used to expedite the progress of the maddened animals towards the smaller yards. The leaders beholding a gate, recognise a trap and essay to turn. Vain hope! They are doomed to blind progression like the leaders of a democracy. They must keep in the forefront of the movement or be trampled under foot. Lost is all pride of place; they are forced on, sideways, backwards, even heels over head, through the gate by the maddened rear ranks observant only of danger from behind. Two men creep past along the fence towards the gateway, and at the exact instant upon which the recoil takes place, the rails are put up and secured, abruptly blocking the most forward bullock, whilst undecided whether to advance or retreat. Half of the herd is now enclosed in the forcing yards; the remaining moiety, returning, form a smaller ring, and recommence horning their

friends where they left off. The men again are quietly sitting upon the 'cap,' where pipes are relighted, preluding a hand-to-hand encounter.

During these last proceedings Mr. Neuchamp transacted a slight experience in this wise. Armed with his hunting-crop, he had chosen the centre of the line, in view of the cattle. When the panic from the van became communicated to the rear, the whole body turned and rushed frantically back to their old position. The stockmen and black boys, well used to the movement, opened on each flank, leaving free egress. Mr. Neuchamp, less prompt and agile, found himself alone and opposed to a legion of horned demons, going straight down his throat, it appeared to him, at the rate of 1 to 41. The leading bullock instantly appropriated him. Ernest, however, had 'seen his duty, a dead sure thing,' and appeared truly anxious to perform it. Not to interfere with the 'ragers' right to fair play, he made straight down the yard instead of cutting across at right angles.

Away, therefore, went Ernest Neuchamp, with a bullock, in sufficient training to win a moderate Derby, within two yards of him. It is admitted that a man under such circumstances always runs up to his best form. Therefore the decision 'by a short horn,' given by a sporting stockman seated on the fence, who kindly acted as judge on the occasion, created no surprise. Brooding over this occurrence, Ernest concluded to choose a position nearer to the fence on the occasion of the next drive.

Now another act commences. About fifty head have been run into the drafting lane and are ready for separating. The 'lane' is a long narrow yard about three panels wide and eight in length—a panel of fencing is not quite nine feet in length—immediately connected with the pound or final yard, and leading into it by a gate opening into the latter.

Two men have dropped down into the drafting lane, and are standing, one close to the gate, the other nearer to the cattle. The gateman wields a short drafting stick, not more than three feet in length, of approved toughness, his work being at *very* close quarters. This, the most onerous position in the yard, requires much the same qualities which the harpooner to a whaleboat must own. Quickness of eye, coolness, and daring are indispensable. His duty consists in preventing two or more cattle of different classes from passing through the gate simultaneously. He is imperatively called upon to read brands, observe ear-marks, age, sex, taking due heed to preserve his own life withal. This, for instance, may suffice for an example. Several beasts are cut off by his comrade down the lane, with one only, perhaps, belonging to a different class. He marks the superfluous individual at a glance, but does not move till they are close upon him. Then, like lightning, he encourages those required by light but rapid blows. The bullock to be 'blocked' receives one on the nose which arrests him for an instant, just

long enough to permit his comrades to move irrevocably through the gate. As the gate closes behind them another tap causes him to turn tail and fly to the rear. Whenever this 'pound' holds cattle of *only one class* you hear the deciding shouts from the cockatoo stockmen, who are doing the 'reviewing,' safely on the fence, of 'Fat,' 'Bush,' 'Stranger,' or 'Calf-yard,' as the case may be. At large musters for stragglers, you will also hear the further divisions of 'Up the river,' 'Down the river,' 'Over the river,' as well as 'Bush,' ring out in constant succession for hours; the last comprehensive direction being used for the station cattle. The unerring dexterity of the 'captain of the gate,' and his rapid disentanglement of the seemingly endless streams of violent brutes passing through the lane, fill Mr. Neuchamp with admiration, and demonstrate to him that this is a leaf of colonial experience hitherto by him unfolded. He and his mates have gathered their adroitness from a life-training, and are little less perfect with the drafting stick in their line than Cook with his miraculous cue.

'Ragers,' it may be explained, can only be drafted in two ways, or modes of separation—the stragglers or strayed cattle being divided from them, in the interest of the attendant stockmen from the adjoining stations, who take them home after the muster is over.

Two gates leading from the pound at the far end are now taken charge of by the black boys, Boinmaroo and Piambook—the one answering to 'Bush,' the other to 'Strangers.' The gate from the lane is opened and the 'ragers' invited through. The invitation is accepted *en masse*, and in spite of two or three going down stiffened by a judicious blow behind the horns, they rush fiercely into the pound, and herd themselves on Boinmaroo's gate, taking it clean off the hinge and flattening out the primeval, who hangs on heroically.

Mr. Neuchamp, after 'they have all passed by,' over gate and boy, rushes out to recover the corpse. Before he reaches the fatal spot, however, that slippery heathen is up and flying round after the bullocks, and, indeed, after his pulverisation looking like a demon.

After a voyage of discovery round the yard at full speed, they return, best pace, into the lane, where they are permitted to calm themselves before the next attempt. When it is made, they behave better, though all the while keeping the drafters incessantly popping at the fence by truculent charges. One hand is stationed in the pound to pass the cattle through, where a gate is opened,—no sinecure, with this class of cattle, their rage and desperation being by this time beyond all bounds. Many a man has lost his life in performing this apparently simple task.

In addition to the ordinary and patent dangers to the yard, Ernest narrowly escaped, when sitting in a dignified manner upon the 'cap' of the pound—a substitute rail more than seven

feet from the ground—being hooked off by the scythe-like horns of an infuriated incorrigible. He was then and afterwards dubious as to whether his and Piambook's joint essay at improved cattle-drafting was a fair test of his theory, the energy and bloodthirstiness displayed by the present performers leading to a reconsideration of his system. However, with true British pluck, he will not desert his theory without further trial.

He had observed that in cases of 'charging,' the assaulted one merely jumped on to the bottom rail of the yard fence, held on by the top, and met the advancing foe with a seemingly unnecessarily cruel blow on the nose, in most instances causing effusion of blood. The blow, unless with a recognised 'bravo,' was sufficient to avert the charge.

Ernest took the first opportunity to volunteer for this post, which was freely accorded to him—the chief requisite being agility. With a light switch he betook himself into the yard. The first half-dozen shot through like cannon-balls, possibly not having cast eyes on the congenial prey. This state of affairs did not continue.

The acknowledged bully of the yard put his head down and charged into the pound like a whirlwind. The gate was shut and all hands seated upon the fence with marvellous celerity. This warrior was a very evil-looking beast—a tall, hurdle-built magpie brute, with a development of horn remarkable even in that forest of frontlets. One circle he made round the pound, tossing blood and foam from his nostrils on every side, savagely lunging at every one he passed on the fence, treating the heavy blows which, alas! from time to time fell heavily upon his bleeding face with superb contempt. As he passed Mr. Neuchamp that gentleman lightly dropped behind him and switched him on the haunch, as a hint to move through the gate held open for him by Piambook. The mighty beast swung round. For one second his glaring visage seemed to say, 'I'll have your blood, anyhow.' That second prevented the impalement of a hero of fiction! Ernest turned, and for the second time that day showed great pace. But when making a spring at the fence, between the pound and the lane, his foot slipped off the rail and he fell forward from the 'cap.' The maddened animal, seeing his victim escaping, gave a terrific bound and succeeded in planting his fore-feet on either side of Mr. Neuchamp, though his hind-quarters still rested on the ground. Here he made frantic efforts to clear the panel and Mr. Neuchamp, the agony and uncertainty of whose position were indescribable, as his gasping articulation testified.

But help was at hand. A stalwart Lachlan native sprang like a tiger at the beast's head, and with a few crushing blows forced him to stagger back into the yard. As he turned a comparatively light tap from a wattle drafting stick on the spine, behind the horns, dropped *l'enragé* in his tracks, as if struck

by lightning—his nostrils in the dust, his eyes turned backwards, and his huge frame quivering in every muscle. Slowly recovering his senses, he staggered to his legs, and perceiving Piambook standing in the middle of his gateway, as if inviting him to the feast, rushed blindly and with unabated fury at him. That astute aboriginal disappears from his gaze; he reels wildly through the gate on to his head, picking himself up in the next yard, where he meets with the usual sympathy from his companions.

Mr. Neuchamp is restored by the exhibition of a strongish dram. As he observes the last bullock enticed out of the lane by having a bag thrown to him, which, after savagely driving his horns through, he carried forth thereon in triumph, he confesses that nothing short of hand-grenades, prepared with nitroglycerine, can be esteemed suitable implements for the effective drafting of 'pigmeaters.'

The fray was finished. Enough had been done for glory, and even for some modest minimum of profit. The gates and slip-rails of the yard are scrupulously secured, and all thoughts of work abandoned for the day. On the morrow a grand departure was carried out. The estrays or stragglers—a not inconsiderable drove—were escorted away by the stockrider contingent, who held a collective interest in them. And then, with much care and forethought, with horsemen in front, in flank, in rear, the gates were opened, and the swine-doomed multitude rushed forth, extremely lively, 'you bet,' but gradually assuming an appearance of sobriety as the purposely long day's journeying wore on.

'I call that a bit of first-rate luck,' propounded Mr. Windsor, 'getting all these rowdy old devils off the run in one muster, like this; thirty of 'em, let alone three hundred, 's enough to spoil the best herd in the country. There was some splendid fat bullocks—reg'lar plums—about that Back Lake camp—never saw primer cattle in my life.'

'Nor I,' agreed Charley Banks. 'I never set eyes on a better-looking run than this, let alone the saltbush. It don't appear to me to be half stocked, that's another thing.'

'We shall have to consider what is most necessary to be done next,' said Ernest, with a thoughtful expression. 'There must be many pressing things of importance, as so little appears to have been thought of hitherto. The arrangements are simple, even to barbarism.'

Mr. Neuchamp was shocked that morning, on going into the meat-house, to find that the corned beef *cask* consisted of four upright round sticks, with a hide stretched across. In the deflected centre of this not particularly clean raw hide was placed about five hundred pounds' weight of salted beef. To this magazine the entire household resorted in its need. He at once made an item, 'Casks,' to be added to the tolerably long list of articles required for immediate use at Rainbar which he

trusted to obtain when the first drays should make their appearance from Sydney. He then sat down and wrote a long letter to Paul Frankston, in which he described the delivery of the station, not forgetting to chronicle his gratitude to Mr. Aymer Brandon for his exertions in his behalf, and his satisfaction at the liberal manner in which the former proprietor had behaved throughout the whole affair.

'I feel now,' was his concluding paragraph, 'that I am fairly launched as a pastoral proprietor, and I trust that I shall be able to combine a fair amount of profitable management with the reform of many objectionable practices and the improvement of station life generally, as it has hitherto obtained, on such distant properties as, up to this period, Rainbar may be considered to have been. A large present outlay will be unavoidable, but I feel certain that the increased profits, under improved supervision, will amply repay this and any future disbursement.'

'All very fine,' remarked Mr. Frankston to his cigar, as he put his young friend's letter into his pocket with a dissatisfied air, 'but if he commences to spend money in accordance with his notions of what he calls improved management, he will soon run himself aground. That's not the way young Parklands worked the place when he went into it first, I'll be bound. It's extraordinary how every one who comes to this country of ours will persist in thinking that he has imported the first consignment of brains ever landed upon the continent. Well, I foresee that he will have his own way. If the seasons are good and cattle rise, he may pull through.'

'And if not, papa?' inquired the soft voice of Antonia, who had crept up to the old man's chair and placed her arm caressingly on his shoulder.

'And if not, my pet,' said that experienced colonist, with a subdued growl, into which he attempted to infuse the unfailing tenderness which invariably characterised his speech to his fondly-loved daughter, 'if not, why in three years our young and ardent friend will have to make a living out of his "plans for reform," for he will have nothing else left, as sure as my name is Paul Frankston.'

'Oh, don't say that, papa,' said Mr. Neuchamp's indulgent though sensible advocate; 'surely he is far cleverer than most of the young men that come out and turn squatters with just a "little experience," and see how well some of them have done.'

'It is not that he has a worse head, but I doubt most of all because of his better heart. That will destroy the balance. It's a bad thing for money-making. A man can make money, save money, or keep money, with just as few brains as will prevent him from falling into the fire. But let him have only as much more heart than his neighbours as would overbalance a nautilus, and money falls away from him like quicksilver. It's a fatal

defect, Antonia, my darling ; and I'm afraid our young friend has it incurably.'

'It's a fault on the right side, at any rate !' said the girl, raising her head proudly. 'Those who think tenderly and faithfully concerning their fellow-creatures are not, perhaps, so clever with the "muck-rake" as self-seekers who bore and tunnel, like moles, all their lives, never turning their eyes towards the blue sky, the golden sun, or the glad waters. It cannot but be that those who have loftier aims should have some compensation even in *this* world ; and if they are not so clever in helping themselves, why their friends must help them all the more. Don't you think so, pappy dearest ?'

'He—m !' answered the capitalist warily. 'That depends upon circumstances. Some people require a great deal of helping.'

'The greater triumph when they are finally helped into safety and success, and then they are sure to help others. Prosperity opens the hearts of really generous people more and more. By the way, how did Paul Frankston ever come to make any money ? Tell me that, sir ?'

'Have no idea, puss ; all a fluke, I daresay. I don't think *he* would trouble his head much about it, except for the sake of a certain self-willed monkey, who ought to be in bed and asleep. Good-night, darling.'

CHAPTER XIX

For the first few months after Mr. Neuchamp had commenced to sit upon the throne of Rainbar, there was a large amount of station work to do, which, at the instigation of Mr. Banks and Jack Windsor, was pushed on with and completed. There were any number of calves to be branded, outlying cattle to be got in, the herd generally to be mustered and made to 'go to camp' properly, as well as many other things necessary on a cattle station newly purchased, and which had not been, let us say, very exactly administered for some years past.

'It's my belief there's some of these LP cattle at every station within a hundred miles of Rainbar,' said Mr. Windsor one day, as he and Mr. Banks returned from a neighbour's muster, with a goodly number of cows, unbranded calves, and pen-branded bullocks. 'It was these last store cattle they got that seems to have scattered and made out all over the country. They say it came on very dry after they were turned out. Their horses was that weak they couldn't ride after 'em, so they had to let them go their own way.'

'Indeed,' said Ernest sympathisingly; 'they must have lost great quantities, or did they come back again?'

'They wouldn't come back, because they didn't know the run well enough to care about it over much. But they weren't tee-totally lost, 'cause they've stuck at every herd they came to, and in course of time we'll have 'em all at home again.'

'You are sure they will not be lost?'

'Not a bit of it,' affirmed Mr. Windsor. 'A brand, once well put on, is like a direction on a letter. People may steal the letter, or kill the beast. But every one who don't go in for them tricks will help the owner of a stray beast to get him, if his brand is readable, just as he'd give you a letter addressed to you, if he was to pick it up on the road.'

'What will you do with these strayed cattle, then, when we get them home?'

'We must let them go again; there's nothing else for it. And I'll wager half of them will just turn and walk back again.'

'I have been thinking,' said Ernest meditatively, 'that if we

had a large paddock put up here, it would do capitally to keep strayed stock in, and for the horses. Surely it would save time.'

Jack admitted that an enclosure of the kind would be very handy for the class of cattle referred to, so Mr. Neuchamp at once made a note of a ton or two of wire for the purpose. Thus simply and unobtrusively was the 'Improvement Idea' initiated at Rainbar. Once admitted, it grew and enlarged into vast and even alarming proportions.

How many an ingenuous pastoralist has for years wandered innocently by the charmed ocean-strand of Arcady the Blessed, leading the careless, untroubled life which belongs of right to all true Arcadians, ignorant alike of want or luxury, of debt, of anxious thought for the morrow! When, lo! in a luckless hour, unhallowed desire has urged him to the opening of the sealed, the forbidden casket which contained the Genie—'Improvement.'

The baleful Djinn, accursed of Solomon and many succeeding wise men, towers aloft, darkening the summer sky, and finally demanding the life of his deliverer. In the Eastern tale, the threatened victim cajoled the monster into re-entrance and brazen bondage. Rarely, alas! does the modern enfranchiser of the Demon succeed in enforcing retrenchment and safety!

Mr. Neuchamp had a general idea, based upon Paul Frankston's parting instructions, Mr. Levison's warning words, 'Don't you waste your money,' and even the half-careless hints of Brandon and Parklands, that his course as a squatter was to be guided by economy. At the outset, therefore, he merely ordered articles and implements absolutely necessary. He devoted his spare time to the task of instilling some glimmering rays of intellectual light into the unused but not opaque intelligence of Charley Banks. Finding that the boy had a strong taste for voyages and travels, he provided him with books of that particular department, and gradually had the satisfaction of seeing the lad settle down of an evening to steady reading, instead of to the eternal pipe, with perhaps an excursion to the kitchen and a not wholly improving gossip with Jack Windsor.

He drew him out, and invited him to the discussion of principles of action derived from the lives of his favourite heroes. He encouraged him to digest a certain daily quantity of 'stiff' or improving literature, and arranged that the more humorous celebrities of the day were not wanting. He sketched a combination of reading and reflection, with the hard personal exertion and keen practical attention to detail which the youngster loved. He drew his attention to distinguished persons who combined excellence in both classes of attainment; and he demonstrated how poor and mean a goal is that of material success, unrelieved by mental progress or spiritual enlightenment.

But when all the calves were branded up, so completely that no more work, in that direction, could be done until more calves

were born, when all the stragglers were got in, and there were no musters to attend; as the days grew longer, the sun hotter, the whole routine more uniform and monotonous, life commenced to be burdensome to Ernest Neuchamp. Then the fascinating idea of works and enterprises of a new and reproductive nature, like the temptation of a hermit in the Thebaid, arose with resistless might.

'After all,' he argued, 'if he were able, by his own contrivance and invention, to anticipate fortune for a few years, instead of dragging out endlessly a life, perchance meant for better things, was he not practising economy in the truest form?'

Such, after certain mental conflicts and long calculations, was the question which he answered to himself in the affirmative. From that hour he ceased to struggle with what appeared to be either a matter of destiny or the prompting of an enlightened self-interest, according to the mood in which he found himself when considering this momentous question.

The first operation foreign to the primitive, not to say barbarous, simplicity of the Rainbar establishment, was the putting up of the paddock, at least double the size which Mr. Windsor had suggested, for the safe keeping of straggling cattle. *Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte.* After that 'improvement' was completed and paid for by the crisp new orders out of the book furnished to Ernest by his agents, Messrs. Oldstile and Crampton, a highly unimaginative and trustworthy firm recommended by Paul, a new four-roomed cottage, of horizontal timbers, arose on the bank of the lagoon, to the great amazement of Piambook and Boinmaroo.

By this time a considerable number of the bush labourers of the period had found their way to Rainbar. Rumour, which disdains not the far interior, but indeed seems to be additionally sonorous in the remoter haunts of man, had sounded her trumpet-blast far and wide with reference to Ernest's Neuchamp's acts and assets. The former were summed up 'as going in for no end of improvements,' and the latter were confidently credited with unlimited resources.

The next project possessed the merits of grandeur of conception and perfect novelty, at least in the neighbourhood of Rainbar, the inhabitants whereof might have been numbered among the most pious communities in the world, from their consistent dependence upon Providence, had their morals in other respects borne investigation.

Mr. Neuchamp had noticed that the Back Lake, as it was called, had evidently been filled recently by the overflow of the river, the waters of which had been conducted by a tortuous but plainly defined channel. The level of this inland sea, for it was of great extent, had lowered considerably since his occupation. In the event of a dry season it would doubtless become dry. Assuming this to take place, the cattle habitually watering there would be thrown upon the world—would be reduced to betake

themselves to the 'frontage.' 'Great inconvenience, perhaps loss,' so said Charley Banks and Windsor, 'would result.'

Then again, about ten miles from the Back Lake was another titular lake, dry at present, but with well-defined banks, bearing traces of having once been filled with water. This was called the Outer Lake. It was surrounded by splendid plains, but was only available for the stock during a short period in winter. This natural basin Mr. Neuchamp boldly proposed to fill from the Back Lake, after he had replenished that reservoir from the unfailing waters of the Great River.

After a careful examination and survey, he came to the conclusion that by deepening and cutting the curves of the 'blind creek,' or natural channel along which the waters of the flooded river had always reached the Back Lake, he could ensure the filling of that great basin in an ordinary season. Secondly, by a straight and not particularly wide or deep cutting connecting the two lakes, the outer basin could be filled as regularly and completely as the inner. Noting the levels, and computing the probable expense—considerably under its ultimate amount—Mr. Neuchamp retired to bed at an unusually late hour. But he carried with him the proud consciousness that he was destined to become the Lesseps of the Lower Darling. He slept heavily, but his dreams were troubled. At one moment Piambook approached, anxious to decorate his bosom with one of the brazen crescents which adorn the breast of confiding aboriginal royalty. At another, a group of officials and improbably well-dressed pioneer squatters gathered around him, with approving glances and well-filled bumpers of champagne. Then Hartley Selmore smilingly proposed the health of the most original and successful engineer of the age, while Antonia Frankston gave the signal to raise a floodgate, which permitted the impatient waters to connect the farthest Australias.

Ernest had no sooner 'ciphered out' this fascinating project, than he found ready to his hand a considerable body of labourers, who in one way or another had been employed in putting up the cottage and the paddock. More strength was speedily available, as the report gained rapidly in sensation, until nearly all the peripatetic labour of the land had heard tell of the newly-arrived proprietor of Rainbar. He was impatient, it was said, to fence, dig wells, make dams, and cut canals, in all directions. So the able-bodied swagsman hastened towards Rainbar, with the frantic fear of being too late which characterises the stampede for a 'new rush' among a mining population. Mr. Banks and Jack Windsor, and above all Piambook and Boinmaroo, were wildly astonished at the unfailing stream of tramps, of all sorts, sizes, and capacities, that poured in.

The blacks began to think that the King of England had made up his mind to take away Rainbar from Mr. Noojim, and that this was the vanguard of an army sent up to enter into possession.

Charley and Jack Windsor, sharing the prejudices of old-fashioned squatters against 'too many hands about the place,' looked grave. Indeed the latter ventured upon a mild remonstrance, as he sent man after man to work at the canal. Rations began to be served out in such quantities, that Charley Banks, who was storekeeper, had little else to do but to distribute. He stated his conviction that the flour would soon be gone if the drain continued. 'Then,' he supposed, 'they would have to live upon beef and pumpkins until the next drays came up. Getting through work was all very well, but this was making the pace *rather* strong.'

'Don't you think, sir, excuse me,' said Jack one day, when a bag of flour and half of the last bullock had been served out in one forenoon, 'that we're getting rather too many knock-about men for a small station like this? It ain't my place, I know, to meddle with your ways of managing, and so on; but I've been on many a station, and I've never seen half, or quarter the muster we've got here lately.'

'I shall always be willing to hear and consider your opinion, Jack,' said his master, with that philosophic urbanity which distinguished him; 'you are a shrewd, sensible fellow, and, I know, faithful to my interest. But you *must* see that the cost of employing one man for fifty days, or fifty men for one day, is precisely similar. Excepting always that you save forty-nine days in time by the latter arrangement.'

'Well, that's right enough, sir; but, somehow, none of the gentlemen I know as has made money out of their stations never liked to see a lot of men being fed and paid and kept about the station, except for shearing or such like.'

'But don't you think the canal will be a splendid thing for the run, if we can get the river water to Outer Lake?'

'Well, sir, if it does, all very well, but somehow I don't seem to be quite sure that it will; and if cattle keeps low, where's the money to come from?'

'Whether cattle sells cheaply or otherwise, if we can get five thousand pounds' worth of water for five hundred, it pays well to lay out the money.'

'Ah well, sir, I can't say for that. But I think you might give it a thought whether these chaps are likely to do much of a day's work at this cutting, or whatever you call it. As long as they have their grub and their wages they'll hang it out, one again the other—regular Government stroke, as we say in this country.'

'But how can I arrange it otherwise?' inquired Ernest anxiously.

'Give it 'em by piecework,' replied Mr. Windsor confidently. 'You watch, now, how much half a dozen of the best of 'em does in a day. Measure it when you're by yourself; then run it off what it comes to at the wages and rations you pay. After that you can let it to 'em at so much a foot, or so

much a rod, for them to "find themselves" out of the contract price.'

This very shrewd practical suggestion was, after consultation with Mr. Banks, finally adopted. The small army of excavators was informed that henceforth the pay would be at the rate of so much per cubic foot ; that their rations, of whatever quantity, would be debited to them, as they would have to 'find themselves.' And that no departure from this scale of payment and charges would be permitted. After some grumbling, a little scheming, and a few departures, matters went on quietly. Mr. Neuchamp surveyed with satisfaction, week by week, the smooth-edged channel crossing the endless plain, destined, if all went well, to turn back-country into frontage, and so revolutionise custom and compel fortune.

After this great achievement was fairly on the road to completion, Mr. Neuchamp turned his mind to the dignified and fascinating science of horse-breeding. He had, in the comparative solitude of Rainbar, been revolving this vitally important question, dear to every descendant of Britons in every quarter of the globe. He had been pained and grieved, of late, to observe that so few among the countless droves of equine forms with which the land was overrun were worthy the name of horses. They bore no approximation to the gallant, delicate-limbed desert steed of Arabia—as little to the stately, swift, and powerful animal that the science of English breeders has evoked from the questionable coursers of the past.

He looked around, inhaling the dry, pure, exhilarating breeze, and marked the wide expanse of sandy levels. He felt the fervid rays of the true desert sun. 'This,' he exclaimed, 'this is the climate, this the soil, the land, for the ancient royal desert blood, and no other. Here one might rear a race of gallant steeds, that would sweep tireless on from dawn to midnight.'

He recalled the magnificent performance of the two aged but high-descended mares, so wondrously described in the passage of the *Talisman*, when the Hakeem bears away his guest through the desert from the pursuit of the Templars. He thought with disgust of the sudden collapse, after only a couple of miles of sharp going, that his cob had treated him to, when the blue bullock thirsted for his blood. And vowing that, in days to come, no proprietor of Rainbar should suffer probability of so ignominious a doom, he was confirmed in his resolution to acclimatise a race of Australian Arabs at Rainbar, which, glorious in the present, should live in the future unsurpassable and immortal.

He ultimately arrived at the conclusion that it became the solemn duty of every man, placed by Providence in the enviable position of a pastoral proprietor, to do his best to provide the good land, to which he owed so much, with some lasting benefit or substantial legacy.

Mr. Neuchamp's bequest to the tutelary deity of Australia—plus the most improved shorthorns, which he was determined to promote, with his heart's blood if necessary—was to take the shape of a stud of Arab horses. In imagination, he saw them caracoling over saltbush plains and sand ridges, tossing their small expressive heads, waving their flowing manes and tails, while their clean, flat, everlasting legs and iron hoofs would be patent and admirable to every one who had sense enough to know an Angora goat from a deerhound. In the event of remounts, which were continually required for the Indian army, an entire regiment might be supplied from Rainbar in days to come.

Mr. Neuchamp gave the reins to this Arabian imagination, until he began to be oppressed with the crowds of princes and magnates of the earth, who came suing for the inestimable privilege of a charger from the Rainbar stud. Then he closed the day-dream. But the idea was fully developed, and he wrote to his agents to order a high-caste Arab sire, to be sent down at once from India. He then made arrangements for a number of well-bred brood mares, wherewith to make a commencement of the great Rainbar Austral-Arab stud.

The summer had come to an end ; the autumn had fairly set in, when the time for mustering fat cattle arrived. That portion of the economy of a cattle station, so suggestive of coin, was safe to be attended to. This was perhaps the pleasantest description of work which had happened during the period of Mr. Neuchamp's proprietorship of Rainbar.

Under the apparent leadership of Charley Banks, with the aid of Jack Windsor, the neighbouring stockmen went forth on the war-paths, and the cattle were duly mustered upon the Main camp, the Sandy camp, the Wild Horse camp, and finally at the Back Lake camp. No yarding took place. The fat cattle were to be duly separated, after approved custom, known as 'cutting out,' at each camp.

A muster for 'cutting out' is a novel and exciting scene for the stranger tourist. A cattle 'camp' is a rendezvous, used by a subdivision of a herd of cattle for purposes apparently of friendly gathering, converse, and social recreation—a Bovine Club. Sometimes the needful bare space, covering from an acre to half a dozen, is situated under shady trees ; sometimes by the side of a river, marsh, or water-hole ; sometimes on a naked sand-ridge, shadeless, waterless, alike destitute apparently of beauty and convenience.

The system of camp, with the aid of which the greater part of the work of every cattle station is carried on, would appear to have originated in the earliest days of colonial cattle-herding, the instinctive tendency of all cattle permitted to rove at will within certain limits being to assemble daily, generally as the heat commences to become oppressive, at a given spot, affording for the most part shade and water. Towards the decline of day

the friends or acquaintances separate, each moving slowly on to its particular feeding-ground. A peculiarity of bush cattle, partly instinctive, partly the result of training, is to run to camp upon hearing alarming noises, or being disturbed at their feeding-grounds. Cattle in their natural state are exceedingly timid. Nothing is more common than for two or three hundred head, feeding at the outskirt of a large run, to start off in sudden alarm at the flight of birds, the sight of blacks, or the stampede of a mob of wild horses. At a moment's notice they are off at full speed, which they keep up without 'crying crack,' as the stockmen say, until panting, and with heaving flanks, they can halt and 'round' up in the beloved camp.

Of this peculiarity advantage has been taken by stockmen, finding it a great aid to management, and a substitute for expensive stockyards and troublesome yard drafting. Thus one of the first things which an experienced stockman does when he is forming a cattle station, by herding the cattle upon it for the first occupation, is to regulate the camp. If he perceives that the cattle, after being turned loose, and no longer 'tailed' or followed daily as a shepherd does sheep, of their own accord 'take to,' or agree to prefer, certain suitable localities for camp, he wisely does not interfere. He merely observes and visits from time to time, but, traversing daily the outskirts of their beat, or by cracking his whip or using his dogs, rouses and alarms them, so training them to 'run to camp.' After a few months of this exercise he is moderately sure that on any given day he will find at a certain hour the larger proportion of each subdivision of the herd at one proper camp, and that almost every straggler will find its way to some rendezvous of the sort. If the camp be unsuitably placed, the stockman shoots a beast of no value, and leaves it upon the spot which he selects for a camp. He then makes a practice of driving the adjacent cattle to the spot two or three times a week. They are attracted by the decomposing carcass, around which they paw, roar, and trample, after the manner of their kind. Gradually the space immediately around is rendered bare. The cattle become familiarised to it as a daily lounge. They commence to run towards it, and of their own accord, and then the camp is formed.

Such is their origin and nature of formation. The advantage is patent. The driving of cattle, especially of a large herd, into a yard is always a troublesome, costly, and injurious process. The larger and fiercer cattle horn, crush, and sometimes fatally injure the weaker. Calves are hurt. Occasionally valuable cows are injured; even the strongest and fattest animals are not improved by the cruel goring and ceaseless crushing to which they are exposed during days or nights in the yard.

In camp-work there is little or no chance of oppression or hurt. After an hour's 'beating up,' and ringing of whips, streams of cattle are seen pouring in from every point of the

compass towards, let us say, the main camp. Generally situated at no great distance from the stockyard, this is supposed to be the central and principal trysting-place. From one side comes a long string of comparatively sober and peaceful cattle, comprising a goodly number of cows and calves. They trot leisurely, perhaps merely walk, until they reach the bare mound by the side of the long reed-covered lagoon, shaded by venerable white gums. There they halt or walk peacefully round and round. But stop—now far and faint more whips resound, which from time to time one hears like a tapping-bird or the snapping of dried sticks. Only the half-Indian sense of the bush-reared stockmen could say with certainty that these sounds were the volleying detonations of the mighty stockwhip, that terrible weapon in the hands of an Australian bushman. The sounds are louder, nearer, less ambiguous; the muffled lowing of a great concourse of cattle comes down the wind, mingled with shouts, yells, and strange cries. At length the herd gradually come—

Nearer still, and yet more near,
The trampling and the hum,

when suddenly there is a shout of 'There they come,' and a long line of magnificent bullocks, fiercely excited, breaks through the adjoining timber. On they come at a swinging trot, heads down, eyes glaring, in some instances tongues out, heading straight for the camp. Behind them is a great herd of mixed cattle, of which they are the advanced guard. There are so many of them that the 'tail' or rear is not at present visible. From the increasing whip volleys, the barking of dogs, and the shouts and cries of men, it would appear that the 'tail' is not actuated by the same lofty feelings of pride and courage which mark the 'head' of the column that has just dashed into camp in such distinguished fashion.

'My word!' said Charley Banks, 'that's something like a mob! What a lot of rattling bullocks, shaking fat too; this is my sort of cattle run; everything fat, from the calves upwards; as long as there's plenty of rain, there's no fear of the feed running short, and my opinion is that there's room for twice as many cattle as we've got—and more than that, if there was water at the back.'

'And I feel confident,' answered Mr. Neuchamp, who was surveying with an eye of satisfaction his camp full of well-conditioned cattle, 'that in less than two years there will be water all the way from the river to the Outer Lake. That will be something like an improvement, as you Australians call everything from a bark hut to a five-hundred-guinea wash-pen.'

'I hope so,' said Mr. Banks, without any great show of enthusiasm. 'But improvements cost a deal of money, and my old uncle used to say that the money ought to come first, in station

management, and the improvements afterwards. He made plenty, but he never would go into debt, even for his wool bales. He used to lecture me for buying so much as a pair of hobbles without paying cash.'

'The principle is sound, no doubt,' replied Ernest thoughtfully. 'But it may be pushed too far; I think many of the older pioneers might have made all the money they did in half the time if they had only had sufficient foresight to organise plans of reproductive outlay, certain to pay cent per cent upon any money which they might have expended, or even borrowed at reasonable interest, for their construction.'

'Old Nunkey used to say that reasonable interest had a knack of growing into unreasonable interest if you didn't pay up half-yearly, which people often found something to prevent their doing,' said the prudent youngster. 'Of course, I don't know much about spending money, I never had any to speak of, but there's nothing beats a certainty, *I think*.' Here 'the tail' of the large lot of cattle, of which 'the head' was so sensational and satisfactory, made their appearance, much gratified at being permitted to round up on the camp and mingle with the main multitude, with which they exchanged pushes, greetings, and salutations. Behind them rode Jack Windsor, accompanied by a band of picked volunteers, who, with him, had done an immense amount of outpost duty since sunrise.

It was considered reasonable to devote half an hour to rest and refreshment, which comprehended the calming down of the somewhat excited cattle, and a smoke for the stockmen. After this a disposition of forces was made. Certain moderate performers were told off to encircle and keep within the camp limits the main body of the cattle, while the 'equestrian talent' was selected to carry out the more dashing and delicate duty of 'cutting out.' And few tasks had a more difficult appearance than to divide the fierce and wild-eyed bullocks from the mixed medley of a thousand head of cattle of all ages and sizes which crowded the camp.

First, Jack Windsor and a friendly centaur—part and parcel of a violent black mare—ran out half a dozen quiet cattle, placing them in charge of three other men, at about two hundred yards' distance from the camp. Then he, Charley Banks, and half a dozen of the best mounted men went in to the herd, and commenced to run out, singly or in pairs, such fat cattle as were up to the marketable standard.

Mr. Neuchamp for a while confined himself to riding usefully but unromantically round the cattle on the camp, preventing them from flowing out in unnecessary directions, and making off when the entertainment commenced to flag. He watched bullock after bullock being edged out by the trained horsemen to the rim of the camp, then suddenly forced into the open by the sure and sudden whip, which, silently raised, appeared to drop upon every portion of any given animal at once. As the

roused animal commenced to stretch out into a gallop, to halt suddenly, to attempt to wheel in his tracks, it was a sight worth seeing to note the swift, wary, duplicate motion of the stock-horse, the watchful alertness with which the stock-rider reined his horse, urged, restrained, or checkmated the doomed bullock.

As Mr. Neuchamp gazed, he came to the conclusion that the emigrant Briton, if young and active, might attain considerable ability in stock-riding. But as for the lithe instinctive swaying grace with which horse and rider moved alike in desperate rush or wondrous whirl, it was unapproachable by any one 'not to the manner born.' One hour, two hours, passed, and still the same rapid and continuous selection of beeves went on. The once small drove of 'cut-out cattle' looked important and respectable. Then the bold idea struck Ernest that he too might as well do a little 'cutting out.' It was more exciting than pacing soberly round the mixed herd on the camp. Besides, it did not look difficult. He had only his hunting-whip with him. But he thought that the stockwhips were sometimes unnecessarily used; cattle he still believed were capable of being acted upon by gentleness and unvarying quietude of behaviour. So, taking Osmund by the head, who had had a certain amount of cattle driving at Garrandilla, and was handy enough, Mr. Neuchamp rode soberly through the herd to select a fat beast and distinguish himself in turn. Most probably he would have covered himself with glory, but it occasionally happens in this world that Fate seems to exercise all her ill intentions upon the knight even *before* he is fairly in the lists at the tournament. Surely no evil hap is so sore to bear as this. 'Had I but a chance,' says the stout champion, 'had I but lifted sword and held shield, I care not though Guy of Warwick were in the *mêlée*; but to be made captive ere the battlefield be reached, or one trumpet blast sounded in mine ear, that indeed is the utmost malice of destiny.'

Ernest, carefully guiding his steed through the third rank of staring or timid cattle, did not notice an old black cow with one horn sticking out from her head, who was regarding him with a fixed and gloomy stare. Her nerves had been much tried since she came into camp. She had felt more than one savage cut of the stockwhip in acknowledgment of her ferocious demeanour and well-known character. She had been horned in the ribs and otherwise maltreated by ungenerous bullocks, who took that mode of requesting her to get out of the way. Her naturally morose temper had given way. She was perhaps unconsciously hungering and thirsting for the chance of avenging her wrongs.

As Mr. Neuchamp essayed to pass her with a view to getting out a noble red bullock of about eleven hundredweight, standing like a small elephant among the cattle, an uneasy steer on the farther side gave the black cow a vicious poke in the flank. This was the match required for the combustion. With a short

bellow she sprang forward, and marking Ernest, not far out of her track, immediately went for him. Had he been in open ground he might have 'cleared' in time. But the closely-packed cattle embarrassed him. Had one of the stockmen been similarly placed he would with one of these same disapproved-of stockwhips have half blinded, and wholly checked, the cow by a ceaseless rain of precise and painful lashes across the face. But having neither whip nor elbow-room, Mr. Neuchamp was compelled to adopt the drifting policy. He tried ineffectually to outride this old black demon, whose ferocity did not require a stockyard, and then struck forcibly at her with the hunting-whip; but it was not long enough to reach her before she came to close quarters. When it did it had not the blinding fire of the properly-wielded twelve-stranded intimidator. He felt a sudden shock as the savage head struck violently against Osmund's shoulder. He held the excited horse together as he staggered, and the furious animal passed on. But he felt faint as he glanced at the straight horn of the old witch, which was stained a bright crimson, and looking downward saw a stream of blood spouting thickly from his favourite's shoulder.

He leaped down in an instant, and seeing a deep stab in the centre of poor Osmund's shoulder, used his handkerchief for a plug, eventually managing to stanch the wound. As stiffness set in, the good horse began to limp. Jack Windsor being called over, a consultation was immediately held, when it was decided that the grey had got a nasty hurt, but that no danger was imminent, and that he would be as well as ever in a month. Much relieved by this verdict, Ernest sent the invalid home by Piambook, with strict instructions to go at the slowest of all possible walks, while he took possession of that gentleman's stock-horse himself.

When Mr. Neuchamp, with his friends, servants, and allies, reached his castle gate, otherwise the stockyard slip-rails, that night, he rode behind three hundred head of as fine fat bullocks of *his own* as ever were sent to the Sydney market. The first draft of fat cattle! Grand transaction! 'What would Courtenay say,' he thought, 'if he saw me in possession of a magnificent drove of cattle like this, all my own and just about to be turned into cash? Let me see, I expect to send away this year five or six such drafts. That will be—let me see—how much at £3 or even £3 : 10s. per head'—and then Mr. Neuchamp fell to calculating the number of calves he should brand this year—and the next, if the cattle went on increasing—the number of cattle he should send off,—and generally piling up Alnaschar's basket to the greatest elevation which that tempting but insecure receptacle of riches would permit.

The fat cattle were duly despatched to market under the charge of Charley Banks and Jack Windsor, Piambook accompanying them for the first fifty miles, to return when they might be supposed to be 'steadied' more or less to the road.

Mr. Neuchamp himself rode by them on the first day, and his heart swelled as the drove of grand-looking bullocks, all 'rolling fat,' as became a Rainbar draft, after a few fruitless dashes for return and liberty, paced quietly though with subdued swiftness along the far-stretching trail that did duty for the highway.

'There is something fascinating, it must be confessed, about this bush life,' he soliloquised. 'I don't wonder at youngsters running away to the bush, as long ago they did to sea. What a man, what a hero, a lad feels himself to be mounted upon a good horse behind a trampling drove like this. Sometimes, even at Charley Banks's age, he may be the owner of such a lot, and the lord of an estate of a hundred thousand acres (leasehold), where almost every one he sees belongs to his employment or dependency. The very numbers of the stock create a sense of responsibility and grandeur. There are three hundred and fifty head in this draft, not a large one. What would they think in England of seeing five hundred fat cattle in one drove, or even a thousand, like the one we met one day. "Where are these fine cattle from?" I remember saying to the stockman in charge. "From Yānga," said he, with an air of perfect explanation, as who should say from London or Liverpool. All well-informed persons, to his mind, must be acquainted by report, at least, with Yānga.'

Mr. Neuchamp's musings came to an end as he perceived that he was no longer needed, and must return, unless he proposed to spend the night away from home without adequate cause, so he paced back ruefully to Rainbar, which fully presented the aspect of a lodge in the wilderness bereft of the cheerful converse of Mr. Banks, the versatile activity of Mr. Windsor, and even the open countenance and expansive grin of Piambook.

He had now before him the cheerful prospect of at least two months' entire solitude, not merely comparative, like an artist in a remote Rhineland or Norwegian village, but absolute, unrelieved, impossible of improvement, save by accident, as that of the keeper of a lighthouse.

It may be a matter of justifiable curiosity among those who have never led the eremitical lives which, 'for a season, and for that reason,' the proud pastoralist is occasionally compelled to endure, how, in this lone Chorasman waste, Mr. Neuchamp contrived to spend his time. Something after this fashion, if I, who write, may transcribe a page of long ago, when the 'fever called living' was more recently induced.

He rose early, which, in the bush, means at or before sunrise. Glorious, in good sooth, is the early morn in the Australian wilds. Cool, clear, invigorating to the inmost nerve. Cloudless for the most part, and, before the midday sun asserts his might, perfect as a poet's dream of the serene untempested heavens of the isles of the blest. Granted that, at cattle stations in the

far interior, it is *very* difficult to know what to do in the way of work, recreation, or exercise, when you are up. Some original thinkers have partly solved the problem by habitually lying in bed until they had just time to dress for breakfast.

But not of such mould was Ernest Neuchamp. He had already assured himself of profitable occupation for all the time that should intervene between leaving his couch and taking the cold bath which preceded dressing for the day. He had determined that the garden at Rainbar should be one of the chief modes of reformation of bush habitudes upon which he was bent.

To this end he had, as early as such loading could be procured, ordered from town great stores of fruit-trees and plants befitting advanced horticulture, besides all manner of vegetable seeds, with a small assortment of flowers and shrubs.

He had caused to be trenched, and laid out in proper beds, a flat near the river through which the waters of that stream were led for purposes of irrigation. In this promising spot, in despite of the powerful sun-rays, the growth of all vegetation had been rapid and successful. He had therefore secured that perennial source of interest which a well-kept garden supplies to him who is fortunate enough to possess a taste for horticulture. In it he found a sufficiency of light labour for all the spare time which he could devote to it. Daily did he congratulate himself upon having in the wilderness one of the purest pleasures known to mankind—one which increases rather than fades with the lapse of years, and which richly repays both in result and occupation any outlay in its earlier stages.

He had therefore no difficulty in finding adequate scope for his energies during the early or the later unoccupied hours of the day. The chance wayfarer descried him in a rough serviceable suit, delving, weeding, or seed sowing in the fresh hours of the morning, or towards the coolness of the evening shadows. After a morning hour or more thus spent, he saw that his stock-horse for the day's ride was caught, saddled, and left ready for use. Then he proceeded to his bath, transacted in a rough but sufficient bath-room composed of slabs, and, fully attired for the day, sat down with appetite to the breakfast which the old hutkeeper had, somewhere about eight o'clock, provided for him.

He had succeeded in arranging the transit of a very fair library, comprising his favourite standard authors, with whom, including a regular instalment of magazines, he held converse during the principal part of the breakfast hour.

That pleasant prelude to the day's occupation over, he mounted his horse, and, accompanied by Boinmaroo or Piambook, set out upon his daily series of 'travels and sketches' through the somewhat extensive territory of Rainbar. Cattle stations are honourably distinguished by presenting some sort of work, if not always very onerous or important, to the attention of an active proprietor, all day long and every day.

There was a little branding to be done. A few head of cattle needed to be run home, and regulated in some fashion. A bullock was required for killing. Stragglers were captured and deposited in the paddock, weaners, milkers—what not.

In fact, so engrossing and interesting became the management of the herd, and the exploration of every hole and corner of the run, that, joined to the overlooking of the men working at the canal, the sun was generally low before Ernest and his attendant returned, with a consciousness of having done more or less a day's work, and with a remarkably good appetite for the corned beef, damper, and tea which composed his chief meal, and indeed all other refectations.

In the evening he was again free to enjoy, without fear of interruption, the intensified delight of the lonely scholar, whose books to 'him a kingdom' are. His correspondence became more voluminous and grateful than he had ever known it to be heretofore, and when the hour arrived for repose, Ernest Neuchamp retired, secure of dreamless sleep and of that cheerful awakening with the dawn known only to the sharer of 'respectable pleasures and respectable labours.'

Such, day by day, was the free untroubled life of Ernest Neuchamp at that stage of his fortunes when, untroubled by care or consuming anxiety, with gay hope in the future, tranquil enjoyment of the present, youth told itself a hundred times each day that the present was fairer than the fairest mortal mistress; while age and care stood dimly gazing afar off, nor ventured to enter the paradise which is rarely sacred from their intrusion when the downward slope of the days of the years of our pilgrimage begins to be travelled. So pleasant is the flowing ascent to the mist-shrouded pinnacle of the moments known as success. There, for we behold it in no other spot on earth, we fondly deem that happiness abides. If that haunting presence, unearthly bright, there displays her charms who shall say? Let those who have reached the spot whence can be descried the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them declare!

The days, the weeks, passed smoothly, swiftly away, until at length Charley Banks and Mr. Windsor return, in high spirits, the cattle having 'topped the market,' and sold extremely well. With the exception of occasional branding and taking heed that the cattle who wandered about 'on parole,' and were not restrained by any fences, did not go away from the run altogether and irrecoverably, there was little indispensable work to do. The selection and delivery of the fat cattle was the most difficult of their station operations. It had been demonstrated that this could be successfully transacted by the present staff.

After the gallant drovers returned, a fortnight was spent in looking through the herd generally. This done, there did not appear to be any possibility of fresh work for two or three

months ; in fact, not until it was time to make another draft of fat cattle.

‘I see now,’ said Ernest, to that constant and sympathetic confidant, himself, ‘the mistake of the pioneer settlers of the Australian interior: they narrowed their mental vision to the mere actual facts of their positions, they discarded change and resisted enterprise. Now the obvious course which would occur to any man of intelligence and forethought, anchored for years of his life in a primeval waste such as this, would be to develop his property to the fullest extent compatible with his pecuniary safety. Then, at the first favourable turn of the market, he might sell out to advantage, free either to repurchase a cheap unimproved property, or to betake himself to the intellectual elysium of the Old World—that abode of art, science, literature, classical glory, perfected luxury.’ Here Mr. Neuchamp checked himself with an involuntary sigh, and sternly pursued his original line of thought.

‘Instead of which,’ as the country Justice said, ‘they went on year after year, in one dull endless round of life, subsisting metaphysically upon the bark and green-hide substitutes for all that men, in other places, hold dear; without society, without books, without expectation of quitting their desert life, what wonder that when middle life is reached, ere Fortune smiles on the lone hermit of the waste, she should find him with tastes obliterated, sympathies wasted from long disuse—with the whole general mental endowments hopelessly deteriorated? How different might be the lot of an ardent and instructed man,’ pursued the enthusiast—‘zealous to make the most of the light that was in him; keen to aid the advancement of his kind, to help the tardy progress of virtue and human truth. With the materials ready to his hand, he might complete pastoral experiments yet undreamed of, raise the moral tone of his employees, and through them of the land generally, render his homestead the headquarters of philosophical experiment and liberal life and culture collaterally with these lofty aims: such a man might place his future prosperity on a firm basis.’

There are some persons who possess the enviable power of being able to raise the most imposing imaginative structures upon any pedestal of assured stability, no matter of what size. The satisfactory sum which the first draft of fat cattle from Rainbar had realised provided Mr. Neuchamp with such a prosperous future, by the simple process of multiplying their numbers and periodical result, that he felt himself now to be fully justified in undertaking any number of reproductive enterprises.

CHAPTER XX

WHEN the first instalment of stores, of a very mixed and comprehensive description, arrived from Sydney, in three drays drawn by ten bullocks each, Mr. Neuchamp was much impressed by the teamsters. They were brothers who had left their farms in the settled districts for this arduous but profitable undertaking. Finer specimens, outwardly, of the native Australian it would have been difficult to find. Tall, powerful, well-built fellows, they were just the men fitted to found 'a bold peasantry their country's pride.' Their appearance at Rainbar hastened the action of one of Ernest's long-cherished plans. He had always intended, when arrived at the dignity of a proprietor, to establish a rural population in the vicinity of the home station. In time to come their residence and occupation would add value to his land. Available labour would be at hand whenever he required assistance. And a consideration, dearer to the heart of Ernest Neuchamp than aught other—he believed fully in his power, by this means, to elevate his fellow-man in the social scale, to aid both in his material and mental advancement.

In conversation with the brothers, he gathered that they had each a small farm 'down the country,' as they called it, where they kept a few cattle, raised reasonably regular crops, and generally lived an independent but unprogressive life. They admitted that they were pressed for room, and in a bad season lost many cattle. 'How should you like to have a half section each on that flat which you see there?' inquired Ernest, with the light of sanguine benevolence in his eye. 'Your cattle would increase, and in a few years you might be well-to-do, prosperous men.'

The Australian yeoman, as he may fairly be called, is not wholly dissimilar to his American cousin, though the type is, as yet, not noticeably divergent from the Anglo-Saxon. Slow of speech, his reasoning faculties, within fixed limits, are active and vigorous. Concerning matters which relate to his personal or pecuniary welfare, a more shrewd, cool-judging individual does not exist. Well skilled in the valuable art of holding his

tongue, he asks but few questions. He asserts little. But, if you happen to have the arrangement of a bargain in stock or land, or of a contract for carriage or bush-work, with the rural Australian, you will rarely find that the apparently impassive countryman has 'got the wrong end of the stick.'

So, when Mr. Neuchamp made the somewhat unusual offer to Abraham Freeman and his brothers, William and Joe, of permitting them each to conditionally purchase three hundred and twenty acres upon the river-flat, below the house, himself finding the cash for the first deposit payment, they quickly ran over the advantages in their own minds, and came to the conclusion that the 'cove,' or proprietor, was an inexperienced swell, whom Providence had delivered into their hands. They realised the fact that, though cultivation was not likely to flourish in a land where it did not rain, sometimes, for six months, they would be able to keep as many cattle as they liked. From merely legitimate increase, not to speak of chances, such as always occur near large herds, they might look forward to a snug herd each in four or five years. They would have a place to keep their teams, and might continue their carrying uninterruptedly. They could by no possibility lose much, and might gain largely, by accepting Ernest's offer. Still, with characteristic caution in 'making a deal' of any sort, they spoke hesitatingly.

'Well, I don't know, sir, about coming up here for good,' said the eldest brother. 'Our place down the country is comfortable like, and the cattle do middling well' (half of them had died during the winter from cold and starvation). 'I don't know how my wife would like it either.'

'I should be sorry to urge a removal from anything very pleasant as a homestead,' said Ernest; 'but I thought, perhaps, that you might have the advantage here of more land, and the opportunity of getting on faster in life—of course you will, and have the carriage from the station.'

'I believe it might be worked,' said Bill Freeman, the second brother, an astute personage, who thought that they might now begin to be persuaded into accepting their good fortune. 'Certainly it's thundering hot, and a long way over these blank plains. But likely Mr. Neuchamp will have a bit of bush work or fencing ready for us when we come up. It's poor work laying out all our bit of money on a bit of land and have nothing to fall back upon.'

'I daresay I shall have something going on,' said Ernest, who, now that he was possessed by the 'improvement' demon, saw in his mind's eye many new buildings and fencings *absolutely necessary*. 'Of course you will have the preference when any such is given out.'

'Then it will be all right, sir,' said Abraham Freeman, 'and when we take up the land, you'll be ready to advance the eighty

pounds for the deposit on each half section. We can pay it back in work and carriage by degrees like.'

'Oh, of course we can pay it back in a year or so,' said Bill.

'Certainly; I said so when I mentioned the subject first,' said Ernest, 'and I shall be prepared to carry out my promise.'

'Then, after the crops are cut,' said Abraham Freeman, unable to repress a slight look of satisfaction, not to say exultation, 'we'll make a start up, and bring our few cattle with us. They're crawling, quiet things, and won't give no trouble to any one.'

'Very well, that is settled,' said Ernest, concluding the interview—satisfied that he had secured the nucleus of a contented and substantial tenantry, more common in England than in Australia.

So the namesake of the great Sheik Ibraheem, who first depastured his stock upon the waste lands of the period, departed with his brethren and oxen.

Mr. Neuchamp, with a feeling of conscious success, related his achievement to Banks and Jack Windsor. Somewhat to his disappointment the former made no remark, and the one made by the latter consisted of certain mutterings suspiciously resembling profuse oaths, ending with a declaration that 'he'd have seen Abe and Bill Freeman, not to mention that planting rascal Joe, jolly well —— first.'

The sequel of this philanthropic arrangement adjusted itself after this fashion. The brothers Freeman, as soon as they reached home, took measures for selling off their holdings, the proceeds of which they invested in as many cattle from their neighbours as, added to their own, made up a herd of more than a hundred and fifty head, exclusive of thirty-six working bullocks. They also 'gave the office' to a brother-in-law and such of their neighbours as were willing to go into a little speculative land selection. The upshot of which was that, within a year after the proposal to the Messrs. Freeman, Ernest had the satisfaction of witnessing the taking up of half a dozen other selections of three hundred and twenty acres each upon the best part of his frontage. This occupation gave the selectors a legal right to about six thousand acres of 'pre-emptive right' suitable for the pasturage of five or six hundred head of mixed cattle and their probable increase.

Charley Banks openly demurred to all this as very likely to lead to complications as to calves, and stated his opinion plainly that the young lads, of which there were two or three in each family, would be always galloping about the run when not wanted, looking for a horse, a strayed bullock, or with any excuse in fact that happened to come uppermost. He had seen it tried before, he averred, and it had not answered. Free selectors were all very well, 'like measles and fevers,' when you got them in the ordinary course of things, but as to paying to catch them and helping them to come into your place, it was likely to end

in a losing game. But Mr. Neuchamp had still great faith in the inherent excellence of human nature, and overpowered Charley with arguments which the youthful Conservative distrusted but was unable for the present to answer. He contented himself with prophesying that there would be a store and a public-house next at the Long Reach. This of course would end in a surveyed township, and a reserve for travelling stock, by means of which they would lose the use of one of the best watering-places and camps on the run.

Ernest had at first floating ideas of running down to the metropolis during the hot months, for—for some one of the many reasons which generally gather additional force about January or February at the latest. But really, when the time came, there was so much work of various sorts going on that he prudently thought he had better stay at home for another year until he could leave everything in full working order, and go forth 'on pleasure bent' with a clear conscience. He arrived at this conclusion somewhat unwillingly; but he did so from the class of motives which chiefly actuated him, and so settled the matter.

Months rolled on. The many drafts of fat cattle had been mustered and sent away in satisfactory succession. All was realised for that source of income that could be relied upon for one season. The improvements of various sorts had been completed and paid for, this latter process adding up to a much larger sum than had been originally calculated upon. The cutting to the Outer Lake had also been finished according to contract. The cash payment for this same piece of civil engineering for the first time aroused a feeling in Ernest's breast that perhaps he was spending money rather faster than it was made, that it was a scale of proportionate outlay that could not be continued indefinitely. Nothing was more necessary in Mr. Neuchamp's opinion than to improve the breed of cattle existing at Rainbar. To that end he had purchased a small but costly shorthorn stud. He had written to his brother Courtenay to send out to him certain animals of the purest procurable Bates blood. All things had been done that in the eyes of an intelligent public would eventually distinguish Rainbar as a model cattle station, with prize stock and unrivalled improvements. In the future was a plain certainty of trebling value and carrying capacity.

Thus far matters had gone on with undeviating regularity in all respects as where the stock were concerned. Mr. Neuchamp found that whenever his account with Messrs. Oldstile and Crampton needed replenishing on the credit side of the ledger—a position of affairs of which he was informed with much precision and regularity—he had only to muster for fat cattle and despatch a draft to market. He began to believe that such was the invariable state and condition of things. He wondered why all cattle-holders did not make rapid fortunes. He wondered

why doubt should be expressed about the expediency or otherwise of investing in such a steadily profitable speculation ; and inasmuch as his brandings became more numerous each quarter, far more than replacing the numbers sent away for sale, it amazed him to think how such an easy and pleasant way of doubling or quadrupling capital had not simultaneously entered the brain of every man of average intelligence in Australia.

He was now to learn that other factors in the calculation existed. The first slight ripple of the tidal wave which might or might not overwhelm was the remark of Charley Banks one day that they had had no rain for a month ; that the appearance of the weather indicated none for another month, 'in which case,' said Mr. Banks, 'the grass would go back.'

'I had not remarked it,' said Ernest, looking up (it was breakfast-time) from an interesting article in the *Fortnightly Review*. 'Now you mention it, it does seem rather dry. However, I suppose we shall soon have rain.'

'I'm not so sure of that,' said Charley ; 'it looks very like setting in dry, and what's more, Jack Windsor thinks the same, and the blacks say "big one water, longa lake dry up, like't long time"—that looks bad.'

'And suppose it does,' said Ernest, cutting his *Review* carefully, 'surely there will be grass and water enough on the run for all our stock ?'

'Not so sure of that. In this part the grass goes all to nothing in a dry year, breaks off, and blows away, making the country look like a brick-field. Besides, I was reading in Sturt's *Exploration* ; capital book it is'—(Mr. Banks had been craftily led into the path of literary exercise by tastes of travel and adventure, of which line of action he was passionately fond)—'well, I was reading that the year the Captain went down the Murrumbidgee first, 1827, was a terrible drought—worse than anything we have had since. That year was the driest summer in England known for a century.'

'What of that ?'

'Why, didn't you tell me that your letters from England, the last mail, said they were having an awfully hot season *for them*, brooks nearly dry, people having to cart water ten miles, and so on. Well, *our summer follows theirs* in a kind of way six months after. So I'm afraid we are in for a regular dry season, if not a drought.'

'And does that make so much difference ?' asked Ernest coolly. 'This seems a dry country at the best of times ; Nature should be equal to any emergency in that line, from the practice she ought to have had in this topsy-turvy continent.'

'My word, and so she is in a general way,' said the youngster, standing up for his native land. 'But a drought, the real thing I mean, a dry summer after a dry winter, is something awful. I can recollect one when I was a little chap at school, and that was something I never forgot.'

‘What was it like, Charley? I’m never afraid of facts; half the evil of life arises from not looking *them* in the face.’

‘Well, but some facts frighten you like a ghost does, however straight you may look them in the face,’ said the lad. ‘In the year I remember, lots of squatters lost their stock to the last head, and were ruined out and out. There was no beef or mutton fit for a blackfellow to eat. Flour was a hundred pounds a ton, and had to be mixed with ground rice. All of us boys were taken from school because bread was too dear—not that we cared about that. Nobody could sell anything. People almost forgot what money was like, there was so little of it.’

‘We must hope for the best,’ said Mr. Neuchamp firmly, though, as he was speaking, an unpleasant thought flitted through his brain of how he should make things pleasant with Messrs. Oldstile and Crampton, if the easily negotiated drafts of fat cattle could no longer be collected from Rainbar camp. ‘We may have summer rains or thunder-showers; the least thing seems to cause the herbage to grow hereabouts.’

‘We *may* have,’ said Mr. Banks doubtfully, ‘but it don’t look likely to me. If you have noticed, it has turned cloudy and dark-looking, and all passed off again, a dozen times within the last month or two, and that’s as bad a sign as could be.’

Mr. Neuchamp revolved the unpleasing idea thus presented to him much and often in the days following this eventful dialogue. With a sudden flash of perception he saw his course of unchecked improvement and disproportionate outlay in remorseful clearness.

Had he then, in despite of the respectful but marked disapproval of both of his faithful subordinates, experienced in the ways of the land, been steering obstinately on a course with a rock ahead plainly visible to their clear if not far-reaching vision? Would he really find himself landed in a labyrinth of debt, like so many unlucky squatters that he had *heard of*, from which all attempt at extrication would be vain without the total sacrifice of his investment? He felt like a reckless mariner who, having disregarded the cry of breakers ahead, had carried on madly until the fatal crash was heard, and the good ship, dreadfully immovable, lay broadside on to the remorseless billows.

With returning daylight, however, the retrospective reverse having occupied the hours of a sleepless night, came firmer resolves, and even some faint signs of hope. Surely even his rigid agents would advance what money he needed upon the security of his fat stock to come. If they were not to be moved to the disbursing point, his brother Courtenay might permit him to draw upon him for a couple of thousand pounds. That would completely set him free from pressing liabilities, and would be amply sufficient to carry on with until another crop of fat stock should ripen, till this present abnormal state of

matters, with the drought-bound herd of cattle, became a thing of the past.

The days, the weeks, passed on without any alteration of the weather, except what might be considered a passing from bad to worse. Hot days, cool days, windy days, cloudy days, came and went, but no rainy days, although often the sky looked dark, and storm-clouds rolled up in great battalions, only, alas! to scatter, break up, and flee before the sun's rays like a barbarian army at the sight of a dreaded enchanter.

Certain effects commenced to follow the gradual and complete desiccation which pervaded the soil. The grass withered, became brittle and sapless, then blew away before the breath of the harsh hot wind, leaving the red earth bare, baked, and 'much more like a brick-field' (this was Jack Windsor's simile) 'than a first-chop cattle-run.'

The Back Lake commenced to dry up, and the weaker cattle sank by scores in the mud, and either died or were extricated with difficulty. The strange cattle came into the frontage, and strove with the *habitués* of that locality for the very scanty pasture which was left.

Great hordes of travelling sheep laid waste a portion of the run, eating every available particle of herbage within a mile of either side of the road. At first Ernest was inclined to treat these devourers of every green (or dry) thing with consideration, but found that he would speedily possess a herd of cattle and no appreciable grass for them to eat if that policy was persevered with. So Mr. Banks had orders to 'shepherd' every lot through the run, and to describe the proprietor as a violent and ferocious person given to impounding and every legal oppression.

With the colony of selectors amicable relations commenced to be endangered.

Their cattle, having much increased, required a considerable range of pasture. Their owners commenced to grumble if the Rainbar cattle fed over their grazing rights, quite unconscious of their wholesale unnoticed trespass up to the present time. One of the conditional purchasers, indeed, after a brisk argument with Jack Windsor, informed that gentleman that grass was grass now, and that they intended to stand upon their rights. They were poor men, and couldn't see that they were to starve their cattle for Mr. Neuchamp or Mr. Old-champ either. If he hadn't expected to get some pull out of them, he would never have persuaded them to come there. They didn't see as they owed him anything.

This was one of the unkindest cuts of the very hard fortune of the hard season. Ernest felt the ingratitude of his 'plantation' settlers more deeply than any one of them could have supposed.

To make matters pleasanter, he received a letter from Messrs. Oldstile and Crampton, informing him that his account

was overdrawn, and that he could by no means have any more money until the credit side of his balance was substantially reinforced.

He was commencing to fall upon evil days, certainly. What to do he did not exactly know. He was unwilling to write to Paul Frankston and state the case. It would have appeared like a simple asking for a loan. He was ready enough to accept Paul's advice, friendship, and hospitality. He did not wish to be directly indebted to him for money.

And yet, *quoi faire*, without an advance of some sort? For, even on cattle stations, where you are not always putting your hand into your pocket, as with sheep, various occasions for expenditure arise, and money is indispensable.

He had been sufficiently learned in the ways of land to know that store cattle were nearly always saleable, and that one could generally dispose of a large lot more easily than fat ones. But during this terribly dry weather, he reasoned that no one would desire store cattle at any price. Buyers were uncertain as to *when* it would rain, and would delay making purchases until definite assurance of a change of weather. Of fat cattle he had none; they had enough to keep themselves in a pinched, independent manner, but no more. The situation resolved itself into this: money must positively be raised for station expenses for the next six months.

After much extremely unpleasant cogitation about money, for the first time in his life, Mr. Neuchamp finally decided to write to Messrs. Oldstile and Crampton, stating his position, and his reasonable expectation of receiving aid from his brother in England. He made this explanation, requesting at the same time that they would permit him to draw for the sum of five hundred pounds in advance, on the strength of five thousand pounds which he had grounds for expecting that he would obtain from his brother.

This important letter being despatched, Ernest felt more at ease than had been his lot for some time past. In money difficulties, like other matters, the chief misery lies in the stage of doubt or procrastination. This being passed, and a definite course of action entered upon, mental relief ensues. Happy the man whose temperament leads him to bestow the same amount of curative anxiety upon the earlier stages of 'chest complaint' that the majority are compelled to furnish during the more aggravated phases of the disorder.

Mr. Neuchamp, to do him justice, was not a man consciously to remain within the borders of a fool's paradise. Once aware of the necessity for strenuous exertion, he was unhappy until progress had been made. He had previously written an explanatory letter to his brother Courtenay, not defending his somewhat free expenditure, but owning candidly that the sudden change of the season, with the collapse of the marketable portion of the herd, had taken him by surprise, and

reduced him to a state of virtual, though temporary, insolvency. 'However,' he added, 'my herd of cattle has increased considerably, both in number and quality, since I purchased, and I anticipate—though I own I was mistaken about the time when they would become remunerative—that my enterprises and outlay for labour will eventually prove sources of extraordinary profit. At the same time,' he added, 'it is my duty to tell you that I cannot speak with any certainty as to when repayment of your loan may take place. The seasons here are variable and irregular, the price of stock low and high by turns. All I can do is to pay you Australian interest, which is much higher than in England, and to promise to return your capital when times improve. I shall never reproach you if you do not lend me your money, as I do not wish to disguise from you that it is uncertain whether you ever see it again. But if you do not, and I fail to obtain accommodation in any way, Rainbar must be sold, and I shall be ruined.'

Mr. Neuchamp, regarding his letter when written, did not like the look of the last sentence, nor the rather uncomfortable last word. So he cast about for another sentence or two of less obnoxious suggestion. In this extremity he bethought himself of a certain lady-cousin, Miss Augusta Neuchamp, a damsel of very well-defined opinions and courageous propagandism, with whom he and Courtenay had been much at war—she having a full share of the family obstinacy of purpose. So he wrote, 'Give my love to Cousin Augusta, and tell her that she would like Australia uncommonly, in some respects. It presents a great field for her peculiar crazes.'

This important letter despatched, there was nothing for it but to do the waiting on Providence as patiently as was possible to a nature constitutionally averse to suspense and uncertainty. Something of the romance of the kingdom of Rainbar had departed, when the throne and crown jewels were liable at any time to be taken in execution. Its ruler commenced to experience those various throbs and spasms, the preliminary pangs, headaches, and heart-aches, which assail all travellers through the Valley of the Shadow of Debt!

He was not doomed, however, at this particular period of his pastoral existence, to be kept long in the torture-chamber. For Isaac of York there was a Wilfred of Ivanhoe 'round.'

In due course, a letter arrived from Messrs. Oldstile and Crampton, to his great joy, that they had acceded to his request, on the strength of remittances arriving from England; that the sum named was now at his credit; but—but—they trusted that he would not exceed the sum referred to, before paying in money to the credit of his account current, as, they regretted, it would not be in their power, under *any circumstances whatever*, to exceed that advance. And they were his faithfully, etc.

'Hang their "yours faithfully,"' banded out Ernest, in the overflowing expansion of the moment—borrowing a hitherto

avoided colonial habit—‘why do people who would not stretch out a hand to save one from beggary call themselves “yours truly or faithfully”?’—“truth and obedience” for ever on their lips, and how little of either is ever exhibited. However, I am to have the money for the present, and that will last me to the end of the year, by which time the heavens or Courtenay may come to the rescue of Rainbar.’

The pecuniary aid of his formal agents, though grudgingly given, was timely and valuable. Ernest determined to economise, with a view to make the relief fund last as long as possible. Taking a hint from his maritime experiences, he proceeded to shorten sail while such signs of storm and tempest were observable in the financial horizon—a policy highly to be commended, but, like many of our good resolutions and better deeds of this mortal life, ever prone to be late of arrival. So life again flowed on at Rainbar in a monotonous round of daily duties, which the increasing severity of the season rendered tedious and troublesome, but not exciting. The weak cattle were dragged out of waterholes and creeks; the locust hordes of travelling sheep watched and followed, lest they cleared off the poor remains of the dying pasture. Musters were in abeyance until ‘the rain came.’ The drought still remained unbroken. The great canal remained as innocent of water, and as unlikely to be filled, as if it had been constructed between the tanks and the desert gate of Aden. Every superfluous station hand had been ‘hunted,’ to use Charley Banks’s phrase—in fact, that young man had very strongly expressed his idea in favour of contraction of the strength of that department. So that the pleasant spectacle was presented of the station work being done by the smallest practicable staff, viz. the proprietor, Charley Banks, Jack Windsor, and the two black boys.

In the midst of this state of matters a stranger appeared one day, whose knocked-up horses showed plainly in their very visible anatomy the effects of a long journey and indifferent keep. Mr. Neuchamp hastened to welcome the ‘guest sent by Allah’ with true Arab hospitality. Considerably to his surprise he recognised the sun-burned, grave visage of his quondam travelling companion, Mr. Abstinens Levison. That gentleman’s reflective countenance relaxed somewhat as he shook hands with his host, and relinquished his way-worn steeds to Mr. Windsor’s good offices.

‘So you’re the man that bought Rainbar,’ said he with mild acquiescence. ‘I heard that a young Englishman had cleared out Parklands. Smart fellow he is—gone in for a whole country-side on the Darr. Sure to do well when we get rain again. He and I have had many a deal together. Got the best of me once in a big lot of store cattle, and it ain’t many men that have got that to say of Ab. Levison.’

‘Very glad to see you, Mr. Levison,’ said Ernest heartily.

'Come in and make yourself at home. Which way are you travelling in this terrible season? No wonder your horses have had enough of it.'

'Just about done, and that's the truth,' made answer Mr. Levison slowly, and with consideration. 'I'm on my way to Mingadee, a place of mine down the river, about a hundred miles from here. I shall have to walk and carry my swag, for the horses, poor things, are as weak as cats. If I hadn't come through the back country, where I knew a few spots where there's feed in all seasons, such as it is, they'd have knocked up before now.'

'Walking is becoming quite fashionable,' said Ernest; 'people are coming round fast to my way of thinking, that we were intended to use our legs in some other way than lolling upon a horse all day. I saw a police trooper trudging past to the Quarter Sessions at Warren, last week, with a good part of a hide (evidence in a cattle-stealing case) on his back. The mail had stopped running. He told Jack one of his horses was dead, and he was as able to carry the other as the poor brute was to carry him. But you won't have to walk this time, if you'll stay with me to-night. We have a horse or two left, and I can give you one that steps as fast, nearly, as the roan you were good enough to lend me near Nubba.'

'All right,' said Mr. Levison. 'I'd not be particular about it; only I'm a little pushed for time. I have to meet a man about a largish lot of stores that we're dealing over.'

'Buying store cattle in the teeth of a season like this!' exclaimed Ernest in astonishment. 'Why, it's a hard matter to keep alive one's own, I should think.'

'Look here!' said the man of original mould, commencing on the lunch which had been provided for him calmly but with decision, as if the back country that he mentioned had been better provisioned for the quadrupedal than the human part of his equipment. 'It's always been a way of mine to act different from other folks in the way of buying and selling stock. I can recollect the markets for many years back. I've seen sheep at all prices from a shilling to a guinea, and cattle in proportion. My rule is—I don't mind telling you, for *you'll* never do much in the dealing line—my rule is, to buy when every one wants to sell, to sell when every one tries to hold on; and it's paid me, so far. That's good damper of yours: your cook kneads it up well, that's half the battle.'

'He's not a bad fellow in his way,' asserted Ernest; 'but he will soon have very little flour to knead. Drays can't travel, and we shall have only South American fare directly, beef and water. Certainly we have plenty of pumpkins, that's the advantage of a garden.'

'Couldn't have a better thing. Lived on them for a year, in '38,' said Mr. Levison approvingly. 'That was something like a drought. If we ever get one like it again it will cook half

the stock in the country. We're that crowded up now that there's no get-away, as there was then, to the mountains.'

'Then you don't think this season is as bad as can be?' inquired Ernest. 'It seems very terrible to me.'

'It ain't as bad as that time unless you've lost half your cattle and don't see no way to save the rest,' affirmed his guest with mild decision, as if stating some rather agreeable proposition.

'Whatever shall we do?' groaned Ernest. 'I'm half ruined as it is.'

'You've spent a lot of money on this place, by the look of things as I came along,' said this mild but uncompromising critic, filling himself another cup of tea with much deliberation. 'You've been and put up a big paddock and a horse-yard and a grand house; and, last night, I'm blessed if I didn't ride slap into that drain arrangement, miles of it I see there was. Now, I don't say it's altogether a waste of money, but when a young man like you buys a place, he has no call to spend a shilling that he can help till he gets it out of the run.'

'I can understand the prudence of that policy *now*,' answered Ernest, half amused, half inclined to resent this extremely plain speech from a comparative stranger, yet comprehending with instinctively clear perception the unaffected friendliness of intuition and truthful habit of his reviewer; 'but the fat cattle sold so well that I expected to continue paying my way and still improving the property.'

'That's where you made the mistake,' pursued the senior colonist; 'you went on thinking that the good seasons were a-going to last for ever. If you'd kept on selling and *never spending*, you'd have had your money in your pocket now, and might have been in the market for some of these lots of first-rate store cattle that's going a-begging—splendid fine-bred cattle, too, as you ever saw!' Here Mr. Levison emptied the teapot with a benign expression, and, crossing his legs reflectively, looked with mild reproach at his entertainer.

Ernest felt each item of guilty extravagance arise and arraign him separately, as Mr. Levison, with judicial enumeration, went on ticking off his pecuniary sins. In one of these lightning flashes of self-accusation with which conscience favours erring man, he realised the difference of his position from what it would have been if he had doggedly adhered to the scale of non-expenditure which he had found at Rainbar, and had retained the proceeds of his drafts of cattle with which to pay off his purchase-money, or re-invest in stores at the tempting tariff of the day. The faint counter-consolation that occurred to him, under the circumstances, was that if he had acted in such a way he would not have been Ernest Neuchamp at all, but must have changed his very nature and identity. So there was no more to be said.

On the next morning Osmund was saddled for Mr. Levison,

who, after saying that he would be back at sundown on the fifth day, departed for Mingadee. He was good enough to express his unqualified admiration of the gray horse's make and shape as he mounted him. 'I saw a lot of mares and foals knocking about at the big bend,' he said. 'Brood mares are useless wretches generally, and you can buy horses a deal cheaper than you raise 'em. But if you could turn out a few colts like this gray horse here, why, I should begin to think there was something in horse-breeding after all.'

On the fifth day punctually, about sundown, Mr. Levison reappeared at Rainbar. Having crossed the hundred miles of plain which separated the stations in two days, he remained one day, transacting the purchase of the store stock to which he had referred; then Osmund carried him back in two days, 'quite flippant,' as Jack Windsor observed. As he partook of the evening meal in company with Ernest, he essayed to cheer him up after the following fashion—

'I'd a sort of notion that I'd checked off all your money-burying before I left. But it seems I wasn't quite up to the number of holes a man can dig and fill up with sovereigns. I came across the Settlement!—regular town it is; and that native chap—active fellow he is, and no mistake—told me you'd paid the deposit money and given 'em employment, and advanced 'em money in other ways. I've seen new hands do many a blind trick, but I never knew a man before, of his own free will, bring down a lot of free selectors on his own run.'

'It does not appear to be a fashionable thing to do,' admitted Ernest, 'judging from the remarks of my neighbours, as well as yourself; but I am somewhat like you in one respect—I do things upon my own responsibility, and, I am afraid, do not care sufficiently about other people's opinions. Sometimes I am wrong—very wrong—I admit. But at other times I am so satisfied of being right that the whole world would not turn me.'

Mr. Levison looked Ernest 'straight in the eye' with his own singularly clear, penetrating gaze. 'I hold with you in that,' he said at length; 'nothing like a man who acts on his own reason, and sticks to it. He may be right, or he may be wrong, but he'll come out better in the long run than any fellow that follows the wind wherever it blows. And so you believe in these cockatoo chaps? Now, what's the good of 'em?'

'Just so far,' said Ernest, 'that I hope, in time, to see a thriving and prosperous population here, making proper use of the soil, and advantageous to the proprietor, as they in turn would be benefited by him.'

Mr. Levison again regarded Ernest fixedly. His calm features, across whose lineaments the ripple of a positive opinion or sentiment rarely broke, might have been taken to denote the benevolent toleration of one who hears a spoiled child insist upon being presented with a portion of the moon, or propose, with saline agency, the capture of an uncaged bird.

'Population—what's the good of population on a cattle station?' he said, with his usual slow, unpunctuated direction of speech. 'All the crop they'll ever get out of that land you may put in your coat pocket. In a dry season it's as much as the salt-bush will grow, let alone grass or crops. In a wet one, all this country's like a garden, from the Paroo to the Macquarie. Your horses don't want corn *then*, or hay—wouldn't eat it if they were paid for it. What are farmers to grow here that would pay for carriage to the coast? Wheat they can't think of in a hot place like this. Rice and such things they might have a try at, if they were Chinamen. But I can tell you what they *will* do.'

'What is that?' inquired Ernest, reassured.

'Why, you'll find that their cattle will go on increasing pretty fast; and what with grass rights and taking their blocks a little way off each other, they'll have nigh as much of Rainbar as you will in three or four years. I suppose that isn't what you fetched 'em up for?'

'I do not grudge them a fair share of the crown land,' said Ernest. 'The land was made for all of us. But I certainly did not anticipate their requiring more than a limited area at any time.'

'Well, it will be *unlimited* if you don't manage to hem 'em in somehow. They'll give you your work to do, take my word for it, some of these fine days. My nags are a little fresher, and I am obliged to you for as good a mount as ever I crossed.'

'I am very happy to have been able to do you so small a service; and as for your advice, which you have been friend enough to favour me with,' said Ernest, feeling depressed and much lowered in spirit by his guest's extremely 'faithful' criticism, 'I can assure you that it has sunk deeply into my mind.'

'I'm glad of that,' said Mr. Levison gravely. 'There's very few men worth bothering with in the way of advice, and fewer still that aren't too great fools to take it when it's put before 'em. But I took a fancy to you, somehow, from the first time we met, when you had the thick boots and the swag. I thought that it showed pluck in you; and, from what I see here, you're one of those that goes in for helping other people along the road of life. And a thundering soft thing it is, in a general way, I tell you. Why, you've been teaching that native chap to read, so he says.'

'I plead guilty to that,' said Ernest, with a smile. 'The fact is that Jack Windsor is such a smart fellow that it seems a pity he should be left helpless, as all ignorant men are. And there's plenty of spare time in the bush.'

'Is there?' said Mr. Levison. 'I never found it so. But that says nothing. I say it's a manly thing to feel for your neighbour because maybe he hasn't had a hundredth part of the chances you've had yourself. That's being kind and true-hearted, and being a gentleman, as I understand it,' concluded

Mr. Levison, with rather unusual emphasis. 'But that's not what I want to say,' pursued he, buckling up the girths of his second saddle, and arranging his pack with the most accurate balance possible. 'It's this, you want some more store cattle on Rainbar.'

This last proposition Mr. Levison made in a tone of such peculiar conviction that Ernest could not frame a denial, but listened in wonder, merely ejaculating—

'In a dry season?'

'It ain't going to be dry for ever,' said Mr. Levison oracularly, 'and cattle are bound to rise within the next two years, as sure as my name's—Smith,' he added, with a faint relaxation of his facial muscles. 'I've just bought five thousand head of store cattle from the man I met at Mingadee; bought 'em cheap, for cash—my name's Cash, you know—and better bred cattle I never saw. I know 'em well. They're all on a run on the Turon, and I'm to take delivery there. Seventeen-and-six for bullocks and twelve for cows. Can't hurt at that, eh?'

'I should say not,' said Mr. Neuchamp, calculating the scale of profits at three pounds ten shillings, which his bullocks had fetched, and, like all inexperienced owners, omitting to allow for either deaths, losses, or non-fattening tendencies. 'I wish I had half of them here—that is, when rain comes.'

'That's just what I was coming to,' said Mr. Levison, with still slower and more inexpressive enunciation if possible. 'If you'll be said by me, you'll buy the cows; they're about half and half. There's till next April to take delivery of 'em, and you can have 'em at what I bought 'em at—twelve shillings, big and little.'

'But the money?' said Ernest. 'I have only what will pay my expenses for six months.'

'I'll take your bill at twelve months, with interest added,' said the peripatetic philanthropist. 'You write to old Frankston and tell him so, and perhaps I'll renew if no rain comes. Tell him it's Levison's advice to you to make this bargain. He knows what that means. And my way of looking at things tells me that it's a deal more likely than not, that within five years, if you take these cows and breed up, the rain will come, cattle will rise, and you'll have nearer ten thousand head of cattle on Rainbar than five. I shall camp at that lake of yours to-night if I've luck. Good-bye, till we meet again. You buy those "circle dot" cows, and don't you waste your money.'

So departed Mr. Levison, rather incongruously inculcating economy and a heavy purchase of stock all in the same breath.

Ernest lost no time in writing to Paul Frankston to inform him of the offer of his very practical friend with reference to the store cattle, requesting his advice thereon. By return of post he received the following missive:—

MORAHMEE, 20th January 18—.

MY DEAR BOY—Have your letter, and glad to see you are regularly embarked in squatting life, and keep going at Rainbar in spite of bad times and bad weather. Seasons awfully uncertain in Australia; always were ever since I was a boy, and I don't expect them to alter much. People make money here in spite of them, and so will you if you keep a good look-out. As to the store cattle, there's dirty weather ahead—the bank barometer falling and no rain. But for all that, Levison is a man to be backed. He is never far out. If he says cattle will rise, they will rise. I never knew him wrong yet. Where *he* has bought you can't go wrong in following his lead. He has taken a fancy to you, and wishes to put you on for a good thing. I never do things by halves myself. So I advise you to take his offer. Go or send for the cattle when he takes delivery, and trust to Providence to send rain and a market. When the bill falls due we must arrange to pay or renew. Don't overdraw in other ways more than you can help, if you will let me give you my opinion. Crampton tells me your orders find their way down in spite of the dry weather. Spend *nothing*, never mind about its being necessary. That's the safe thing in squatting.

Shall we see you after you have brought your cattle home? We have had awful hot weather. The mosquitoes seem livelier than average. Antonia thinks you might write and describe the country. She met Parklands the other day, who told her Brandon nearly finished all your careers with his four-in-hand freaks. Careful fellow, Parklands. Good-bye, my dear boy. God bless you.

PAUL FRANKSTON.

Thus fortified, Mr. Neuchamp wrote immediately to Mr. Levison, who had with characteristic carefulness left his addresses for the next month or two, and informed him that he accepted his offer with many thanks, and would attend, with Mr. Banks, at the station, some hundreds of miles off, where the cattle were running. This matter settled, he told Charley of the adventure awaiting him, arranging to leave Jack Windsor in charge of the place until their return.

Mr. Banks expressed his unqualified approval of the whole matter. 'This sort of thing,' he was good enough to say, 'was something like. Putting on more stock was the proper sort of work; any money spent in that way would be sure to be returned. But hang these improvements! Filling up the station with a lot of weekly men, and once they're there, it's not so easy to send 'em away again. Levison's a chap that gets good value for his money, whatever he touches; and if he thinks buying store stock is the right thing, I'll put five to two on him and his tip. He will be there, or thereabouts, when the flag falls, I'll lay.'

Within reasonable time a letter arrived from Mr. Levison of a very concise and practical form. It set forth that, upon a certain day of a certain month, his droving manager would be at Leigh Court, in the district of King, where the herd of store cattle which he had purchased were running. That the proprietor was bound by his agreement to have five thousand head of cattle mustered and delivered within one month from the

date specified. That his manager had instructions to deliver to Mr. Neuchamp, or his order, all the female cattle, young and old, of the said herd. He, Levison, had no doubt in his own mind that rain would fall within six months, and he wished him luck. This was the only portion of the letter not devoted to business. Laconic as was the style, Ernest felt touched by it, as the spontaneous expression of a heart filled with daily cares, and with rare leisure for friendship and sentiment.

After a certain amount of necessary consultation and commissariat action, Mr. Neuchamp, one fine morning, left Rainbar with an imposing *cortège*. It consisted of Charley Banks, Piambook, and a man to drive the light waggon, which, containing food, raiment, cooking utensils, and bedding, Ernest very properly took with him. There were other two men, who had contracted to act as road hands and to make themselves generally useful. They drove half a dozen spare horses, Mr. Neuchamp being minded to purchase as few as possible at the seat of war, or the place of delivery. Fast travelling was, of course, not possible under the circumstances. They expected to travel at the rate of twenty or twenty-five miles a day, until they should arrive at Leigh Court, the run to be depopulated, so to speak. It was distant about six hundred miles. There yet remained about two months to the date of delivery. So Ernest gave himself seven weeks for the journey, and trusted to have a week or two for refitting before commencing his grand march homewards with two considerable droves of new store cattle.

Mr. Windsor and Boinmaroo were left in charge of the stock and station. Bitterly did the first-named gentleman deplore the hard necessity which prevented his going forth on the war-path with the other braves.

Every night after the first, on which occasion a neighbouring out-station was reached, and the impatient home-loving horses put securely into a yard, a camp was organised.

Two tents were pitched, one for the master and Charley Banks, the other for the men and any other road acquaintances that might be encountered. One of the new hands had an accordion. He played moderately, but quite well enough to satisfy the uncritical audience, and to enliven their somewhat unamused evenings.

CHAPTER XXI

As the progress of Mr. Banks and his party would necessarily partake of the nature of caravan movements, Mr. Neuchamp decided, after a few days of co-operative wayfaring, to go ahead of his impediment. He would thus be spared the *gêne* of objectless camp life and needless expenditure of time. With regard to the value of this latter commodity, he began to lean to the opinion of Mr. Parklands, and to believe that time was ever in a colony, if not always a synonym for money, at least a matter of high consideration. Apart from this method of reasoning, his route after a while lay through a district which he had never before visited. And a portion of the locality promised to be interesting to the observer of men and manners for a novel reason.

He had since found that the owner of the large herd which Mr. Levison had purchased, as another buyer would have bought a team of bullocks or a flock of sheep, had been compelled to sell on account of the sudden influx of miners upon his run. Gold—the healer, the benefactor, the deliverer, the slayer, the betrayer, the enslaver of mankind in every age, in every clime—had been discovered in the vicinity of the long-silent peaceful valleys in which Abel Drifter's cattle had roamed for more than a generation. Now all was changed, the green dales were invaded by noisy crowds, the waters were polluted, the air was thick with the smoke of camp-fires, maddening with the barking of dogs, the crashing of falling trees. Droves of hobbled horses attended by reckless boys, who galloped and wantoned over the sacred camp, filled the woods with alarm and distraction for the confused, terrified cattle and their despairing stockmen.

Believing if he hesitated that probably half his herd would wander off the run and the other half disappear by dying, Mr. Drifter put the whole herd into his agents' hands for sale, and, as we have named, found a prompt purchaser in Mr. Levison. It was this dread alternative of landmarks, this solemn, dismaying change of the pastoral stage into that of trade and agriculture, which Mr. Neuchamp had been curiously eager to behold.

Passing through that division of the great plain-ocean which varied in very slight degree from his own particular appointment, he entered upon a wholly different description of country, the characteristic peculiarities of which were clearly manifest to him. In the place of the torrid plains and rare watercourses which he had traversed for many days, he saw green park-like woodlands, pleasantly diversified by the long-absent hill and dale. Broad and fertile valleys adorned the landscape, from which many a harvest had been gathered since the first sod was turned. The houses of the proprietors were in some instances large and handsome, surrounded by shrubberies and orchards of ancient growth, or they bore the homely aspect of snug farmhouses, befitting the homes of sturdy, prosperous yeomen.

Fencing of a substantial and contradictory nature abounded, so that Ernest was more than once debarred from cross-country travelling, and forced to adhere to the high road. He noticed that during the morning and evening hours the air was cool occasionally to keenness. The magnificent distances to which he had become accustomed between the homesteads had narrowed to something, if not identical with British habit, at any rate to far nearer propinquity than he had deemed possible in Australia. From all these signs and appearances Mr. Neuchamp decided that he had come upon a new and different phase of colonisation, and prepared himself to investigate and analyse accordingly.

‘Here,’ he said, ‘is one of the cheering results of that human hive-swarmling which we call emigration. How many of these comfortably-placed landholders, enjoying a charming climate, a fertile soil, and that abundance of elbow-room which every Anglo-Saxon needs, were peasant labourers, pinched and overlaboured, small farmers, or impoverished gentry, landless, tradeless, coinless younger sons in Europe? Here they have found their proper *métier*. Here they have repeated history and have peopled a new world under the Southern Cross, where the passionate freedom of their forefathers may be handed down unblemished to the sons of the grandest of races.’

As he travelled this settled region the population necessarily commenced to show signs of alteration, both as to character and density. Instead of the sparse, sunburned, nomadic units of the waste, the more various and pronounced types of agriculture and grazing industry presented themselves frequently and unmistakably.

Mr. Neuchamp hailed with pleasure the opportunity thus afforded of conversation and companionship. He saw the neat taxed-cart, with the farmers’ wives and buxom daughters returning from the weekly market. He saw the farmer himself mounted upon a stout, not over-refined hackney, jogging along the road with the bluff confidence inspired by good crops and good prices. He marked the great fields of maize alternating with hay and cereals, while the wide-fenced pastures, with the

clover, lucerne, and the prairie-grass of America, were thickly filled with thriving cattle or the long-woolled sheep, with which his eye had been familiar in his native country.

'People in England fancy,' he thought, pursuing his ordinary train of thought, 'that life in Australia is principally devoted to lying under the shade of tropical forest-trees, and eating peaches or pineapples; or else that a course of violent and exciting border life is unremittingly hazarded. How little the average British mind is capable of comprehending the widely various conditions of colonial life, necessarily distinct and sharply defined, from the influences of varying soil, climate, and original settlement, with a hundred other underlying laws, by these centuries passed into the one concrete idea of "the colonist." As reasonable would it be to mingle the attributes of the Devon or Suffolk peasant, the Celtic Irishman, the Lowland Scot, the Cockney, and the Highlander, under the general name of Englishman.'

On the day when these truly original ideas had occurred to Mr. Neuchamp he was riding contentedly along the fenced highway with the intention of reaching at nightfall the home-stead of a landed proprietor of some mark in his own district, whose acquaintance he had made at the New Holland Club. He was certain of hospitality and of receiving the clearest directions as to his route. Within a few miles of his destination, as he calculated, he encountered a gentleman, on a well-bred hack, who had just emerged from a lane at right angles with the road.

He replied to the stranger's courteous and unaffected greeting with an inquiry as to the precise distance of Mr. Haughton's house—if perchance he happened to be aware of it.

'I am going within a mile of the entrance gate,' said the stranger; 'I shall be happy to be your guide so far. I shall probably be at Elmshurst to lunch to-morrow, and should be there to-night—but that I have to visit a sick parishioner.'

Mr. Neuchamp had partly conjectured from the dress of the gentleman that he was in holy orders, and of course the point was settled by his admission.

'You are then the clergyman of this district?' said he. 'You are fortunate, I should say, in the locality of your labours.'

'Yes,' said the stranger, rather absently, 'there is no fault to be found with the climate or the scenery, and I have not met in my travels with a more pleasant and kindly society. There is but one defect, and that is universal.'

'And that is, may I ask?'

'Earnestness, thoroughness,' said the stranger, fixing his clear sad eye upon Mr. Neuchamp. 'If those whose duty it is to provide aid and comfort for the souls that are like Lazarus, lying at their gates, leprous and diseased in mind—if they would but give of their substance, or better still, a hundred times

better, of their time and energy, much, how much, could be done for God and for man.'

'I passed a very neat church and schoolhouse just now,' affirmed Ernest; 'surely matters spiritual are regarded here with interest, and if the enthusiasm you lament be wanting, when and in what land is it to be found?'

'I speak not,' said the unknown, a glow of fervour lighting up a pale handsome countenance, and illumining his melancholy dark eyes. 'I speak not of the mere routine donations which reach respectable uniformity and stop there. I speak of the want of the spirit that maketh alive, and in one class not more than in others. The vicarious aid, it is true, is not sparingly or grudgingly given. But the heart's tribute—the life-donation—where is it?'

'I am sorry that it should be so,' said Ernest, thinking what a glorious pastor this zealous missionary would be for his community at Rainbar, when it was sufficiently grown and established. 'I am afraid none of us who are somewhat fully endowed with this world's goods do a tenth part as much as we might. But I do not see how matters are to be mended as the world whirls on its appointed course. Enthusiasm is dead, and belief will soon follow.'

'We might all do much—you will excuse my professional tone of exhortation,'—said this latter-day apostle, 'by performing our own distinctly laid down duties personally and rigidly, to arrest the dreary tendency you refer to—to plant the seeds of a richer and a more vigorous religious growth. I have not the pleasure of knowing your name; permit me to present my card. I trust that we shall meet again under circumstances more favourable for discussion and mutual acquaintance.'

'Thanks, I shall only be too happy. I am Mr. Neuchamp, of Rainbar, where I should be delighted to see you if circumstances ever lead to your visiting so distant a locality.'

'I don't know where my Father's work may take me; but be assured that I shall be much gratified by any chance which involves future intercourse with one of kindred sentiments.'

Mr. Neuchamp gazed at the speaker, and thought he had rarely seen a more uncommon countenance. Still young, he was perhaps nearer to the goal of middle age than to the 'spring of springs' of early youth. The outline of the features was aristocratic and refined. His slight but symmetrical figure, in its careless ease of seat on horseback, suggested more extended practice in youth than was quite compatible with his present position. But the eye, mild, searching, calmly radiant, was the conspicuous feature. It showed the steady unfaltering regard of one ever willing to attest with his blood the truth of the doctrines which he held.

'We pass through these rails,' said he, 'and enter this lane, soon after which my path turns off and I leave you.'

As he pointed to the slip-rails Mr. Neuchamp spurred

forward to prevent his having the trouble to take them down, and practised a manœuvre of which he was rather proud.

He stooped from his saddle, and, raising the top rail, placed it carefully upon the second. Then wheeling Osmund for a stride backward, that accomplished animal leaped easily over, without the slightest hesitation.

'Come along, sir,' said Ernest to the clergyman; 'it is no height, and I will put it up.'

'Thanks, no; you must really excuse me.'

Ernest reiterated his assurances that it was extremely low—no danger, and so on.

All unmoved by Mr. Neuchamp's requests and entreaties, the gentleman with the black coat and gray trousers quietly alighted, saying, 'You must excuse me, I do not leap at all.' He then took down the two lower rails and, replacing them, gravely remounted.

'Do you not think,' said Ernest, 'considering the large amount of cross-country work that a clergyman has to do in Australia, that every gentleman of your profession should practise leaping a little—I mean sufficiently to get over middle rails, and so on; you might be stopped by a low fence.'

'It may be so, there is force in your argument,' said the unknown, with a grave sad smile, 'but I do not care about leaping now, and there is then only one course open, that of taking down the rails. After all there are so many necessary gates, I find that I can generally get about my various duties.'

'Really,' persisted Ernest, 'I hope that you will not think me impertinent, but in a new country like this surely every one ought to train himself to encounter the exigencies of his position, and your seat is so firm that I am sure with a little practice you would soon be able to get over a moderate leap.'

Ernest thought he saw an approach to a smile flit over the thoughtful face of his clerical acquaintance.

'Who knows?' he said, holding out his hand; 'I trust we shall meet again. It may be that we shall be fellow-workers in this good land, where the harvest is plentiful, but the reapers, alas! few. Good-bye.'

Mr. Neuchamp pursued the path indicated, which led him to a substantial country-house, of which the well-kept approaches and trim, yet luxuriant shrubberies, told of long and successful occupation. Here he was warmly welcomed, and Osmund promptly delivered to a neat groom.

'Very glad to meet you in the country,' said his host, a frank, stout, gray-haired, but vigorous-looking man. 'What do you think of our district—anything like this on the Lower Darling? I hear you have settled yourself permanently there.'

'The two districts are about as similar as the West Riding of Yorkshire and the Pampas,' said Ernest. 'But Rainbar is a very good fattening country; that is all one can say in its favour just now.'

'Plenty of room, no diggers, no free selectors,' replied his host; 'well, I wish we could say as much here. I am too old to change now; but I think if I was your age again, I should be inclined to move out back; let the Grange, and come back to be comfortable here in my old age. But I think I heard the dinner-bell. Come along.'

Ernest heard it too, and was by no means sorry to comply with the summons. Dinner-bells, with the accompanying refectations of civilised man, had been rather out of his line of late. He was introduced to the lady of the house, and her well-dressed, fresh-complexioned, cheerful-looking daughters, the very sight of whom raised the spirits of Mr. Neuchamp several degrees.

An active, keen-looking youngster of sixteen made up the family party.

Ernest Neuchamp was approved of by the ladies of the household, as indeed was generally the case, being one of those sympathetic and genial persons whom women instinctively take into favour. The conversation had become general and sprightly pleasant, when in answer to a question about his travelling alone, he happened to mention that he had met, he supposed, the clergyman, not far from their house.

'There is more than one clergyman in our district,' said the lady of the house, 'but I daresay we shall recognise him from your description.'

'He was a gentlemanlike person, rather handsome, indeed,' continued he. 'It seems an odd thing, though, that clergymen, as a rule, ride so indifferently, and especially in a new country like this, where the necessity of long journeys might have given them practice, one would think; yet I could not get your friend to follow me over a middle rail.'

'What?' said his host, with a look of altogether inexplicable astonishment mixed with amusement visible in his face; 'did you give him a lesson in riding?'

'I tried,' said Ernest; 'I am sure his horse would have followed mine if he had mustered up courage, and put him at it. I tried all I knew to induce him, and said that with a little practice I was sure he would soon be able to take moderate jumps.'

'Moderate jumps! oh, Lord!' said his entertainer; 'and what answer did he make?'

'He smiled gravely, and said, "who knows?" then bade me good-bye. I hope he was not offended.'

'Ha! ha! ha!' yelled the youngster, exploding helplessly. 'Oh dear! oh! I'll lay anything, papa, it was Mr. Heatherstone. I shall die! I know I shall. What a jolly sell!'

The girls struggled with their emotions—one hid her face in her handkerchief. The lady of the house smiled, but tried to look grand, and reproved her son, who continued to shriek with

suppressed laughter, and finally bolted out of the room, as the safer proceeding.

His host, making desperate efforts at self-control, said, at length, in a broken voice, 'My dear fellow! you mustn't mind these young people. I'm afraid they are laughing at a little mistake you must have made as to our clergyman's degree in equestrianism. But are we sure of our man—did you learn his name?'

'He gave me his card,' said Ernest, now shuddering under the consciousness of having, perhaps, again buried himself in a pitfall in this provoking happy hunting-ground, 'but I never looked at it. Here it is—"The Rev. Egbert Heatherstone."'

Here the second young lady broke down, while her mamma laughed decorously and under protest as it were; and pater-familias, in an *almost* steady voice, thus spoke—

'You never heard of Heatherstone before, then? No? Well—the man you were trying to lure over a middle rail was formerly known, that is, before he entered the Church from strong convictions, as perhaps the boldest, the most reckless rider in Australia. He has ridden more steeplechases than you have hairs on your heads, I was going to say—but, to speak moderately, a larger number than most men living. Since he became a clergyman, a most sincere and hard-working one, he has given up sensational riding, and being passionately fond of horses, mortifies the flesh by abstaining from all that style of thing. You will excuse us all, I know, for being so rude; but really, you must admit the joke was irresistible.'

'I see—I admit—I confess,' said Ernest, with an air of deepest penitence. 'If I could only do penance for my sins of superficial judgment, it would be such a relief. Do you think the Rev. Egbert has a trifle of spare sackcloth?'

'You didn't notice his seat on horseback?' asked one of the young ladies innocently. 'Doesn't he look like a horseman? He can't hide *that*, or help his hands being so perfect—though I think he tries.'

'He rode a horse over a three-railed fence once, without saddle or bridle,' said the other sister, 'for a bet; before he was ordained.'

'He took Ingoldsby, the great steeplechaser, over a three-railed fence at twelve o'clock at night, and pitch dark too; there was a lantern on each post though,' chimed in the sixteen-year-old hero-worshipper of any reckless deed in saddle or harness.

'The maddest thing of all that I ever heard of him,' affirmed papa, in conclusion, 'was going across country one evening and taking sixteen wire fences running. He won his bets, but he had two hardish falls; one a collar-boner, into the bargain.'

'I really begin to think,' said Mr. Neuchamp despairingly, after every one had transacted a good downright unrestrained chuckle, 'that I shall never become fully acclimatised. This is

the most peculiar and utterly unintelligible country ever discovered; or, am I devoid of understanding to an extent which disables me from ever rating individuals at their proper value?’

He was eventually consoled, and persuaded into singing second in a duet whereto the accompaniment was played with much taste and expression by one of the daughters of the house. He was perfectly at home in this department of criticism, and after receiving a few compliments upon his extremely correct performances, he commenced to forget the stupendous miscalculation into which he had been led with respect to the Reverend Egbert Heatherstone and his equitation. But it was not forgotten by the inmates of the house and the inhabitants of the district, among whom it gradually spread. It always took rank among those glorious jests which, intelligible to every degree of capacity, float on with undiminished grandeur from generation to generation; and a stranger who reached that peaceful district, and was discovered by a delicate course of inquiry never to have heard that joke, was regarded with affectionate interest, and had it so carefully administered to him that not one drop of the *elixir jocosus* should be wasted in the process.

Leaving the honoured abode of hospitality and domestic happiness, with its fertile meadows and well-filled stackyards, Mr. Neuchamp pursued his route quietly, intending to make his way to the property of another friend, whose place was at no great distance from the goldfield town near which was the station upon which his cattle were still depasturing. This stage was rather far for one day. He was considering whether he might expect to meet with a reasonable inn, and humming a souvenir of his last night's concert, when a horseman, coming at a brisk pace in the opposite direction, met him face to face.

In him he recognised a young squatter whom he had often encountered in Sydney in various festive scenes, and who had more than once pressed him to visit his station, if he should find himself in their district. Ernest knew the station of Baldacre Brothers by reputation to be large and rich. In fact the brand had a colonial fame. His curiosity was somewhat aroused to behold the establishment.

Mr. Hardy Baldacre expressed great concern that he should be just leaving home for a journey when his friend Mr. Neuchamp was coming into the district, and made many excuses for not turning back—finally asking Ernest how far he thought of going that night. He mentioned the house of the brother of Colonel Branksome.

‘Oh! that is too far,’ said Mr. Baldacre; ‘sixty miles, if it is a yard.’

‘I don't think I will try to get quite so far,’ said Ernest. ‘Probably there is some inn which will do as a half-way house.’

‘Oh! you'd better stay at our place,’ said his friend with an

expression of countenance not wholly intelligible to Ernest. 'It's about twenty-five miles from here, straight on the road; you can't miss it. You'll find my brother William at home. Good-bye!'

With this somewhat laconic invitation he put spurs to his horse and rode forward at a hand gallop, leaving Ernest undecided as to whether he should accept or decline an invitation not very graciously extended.

By the time, however, that he had got to the end of the rather long twenty-five miles over a worse road than he had hitherto travelled, he discovered that there was no other stage available without over-riding Osmund, so he commenced to look about for the homestead of the Messrs. Baldacre Brothers of Baredoun.

It was nearly dark when he came to a hut by the side of the road, situated in a small paddock, the upper rails of the fence of which were ornamented with sheepskins to an extent which suggested that a new material for enclosures was being tested. Resolved to make inquiry as to this mysteriously invisible homestead, Mr. Neuchamp holloaed to the occupant of the hut in a loud and peremptory manner.

A man in his shirt-sleeves came to the door, not otherwise over-neat, and smoking a black pipe.

'Can you tell me where Baredoun is?' demanded Ernest; 'it ought to be somewhere about here, I should think.'

'This is the place,' said the shirt-sleeved one coolly.

'And is *this* the home station of Baldacre Brothers?' inquired Ernest, vainly trying to disguise his astonishment.

'It's all that's of it,' said the smoker, with an attempt at jocularly. 'I'm William Baldacre; won't you come in and stay the night? It's rather late, and there is no place within fifteen miles.'

Ernest stared before him, around, and finally behind, before he answered the hospitable question. He made a mental calculation as to whether it was worth while to push Osmund on for fifteen miles over an unknown road in the dark. Finally, he decided to sacrifice his comfort for that night to the welfare of the gallant gray, and to accept the ultra-primitive hospitality of Mr. Baldacre.

'I met your brother, whom I had the pleasure of knowing,' he said, 'a few miles back. He was good enough to ask me to take up my quarters here to-night. I shall be very glad to stay with you.'

'All right,' said the elder man, a plain and unpolished personage when compared with his handsome, well-dressed younger brother, who swelled about the metropolis, by no means as if he had emerged from such a hovel. 'Give me your horse; he'll be safe in this paddock. Ours is rather a rough shop, but you must make allowances for the bush.'

Sadly and sorrowfully, after he had seen Osmund left free in

the small moderately-grassed paddock, did Mr. Neuchamp follow his host into the hut. That building consisted of two small rooms. There was an earthen floor, one or two stools, a small fixed table, far from clean. A bed at the side of the room offered a more comfortable seat than the stools, and upon this Ernest deposited his weary bones and disappointed entity, wondering doubtfully whether sleep would be uninterrupted or otherwise.

The usual meal of corned meat, damper, and milkless tea was brought in by the hutkeeper of the period, whose mole-skins were strictly in keeping with the prevailing tone of the furniture and apartment. Much Ernest wondered at the precise mental condition which could suffer two free agents of legal age, the owners of a proverbially rich and extensive run, of a well-known highly-bred herd, free from debt and encumbrances, to live in a state of squalid savagery. He did not exactly put his questionings into this shape, but his manner had expressed a patent astonishment, which his host seemed to consider himself called upon to answer.

'We haven't done much in the building way here,' he remarked apologetically, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. 'I daresay we'll put up a cottage next year. But the old man never would spend a penny on the run here. He was snug enough at the old farm down the country, and somehow I've got used to the life, and it does me as well as any other. Hardy isn't often at home; he's half his time in Sydney. So he manages to hang it out here when he comes to help muster and so on. I reckon he thinks it saves money, and as he hasn't to live here *he* don't care.'

Ernest felt remorseful after this explanation, very simply delivered, at his feelings of disgust and disapproval. 'Suppose,' he asked himself, 'I had been set down here, a raw schoolboy, transplanted from half-learned tasks to the daily labour, the rude association, the unbroken loneliness of a distant station, debarred by a penurious old father from the smallest outlay not immediately connected with the herd, without books, change, society, or recreation, would it have been all-impossible that I should have grown into the mould in which my host is enclosed, or settled down into the resigned, sad-visaged man of five-and-thirty whom I see before me?' It *would* have been impossible in his case, he thought. Still he could enter sufficiently into the probabilities of the situation to comprehend the injustice to which the mental development of the elder brother had been exposed.

'Good heavens!' he thought to himself, 'what short-sighted idiots are parents who shut up their sons' lives in a moral dungeon like this! The abiding in the wilderness is nothing; nay, it has positively beneficial and ennobling tendencies. But this sordid imprisonment of the mind! No books, no companions, no ideas; for how can there be a circulation of ideas if

reading, conversation, reflection be wanting? The whole mind bent and fettered to the level of the branding pen and the cattle market. The smallest outlay affording a glimpse of the heaven of Art and Literature churlishly denied, lest a few broad pieces escape the all-gathering muck-rake. And when the game is played out, the long harvest-day over, and the crop garnered, what is the grand result for which a soul has been starved—a man's all-wondrous brain-marvel, miracle of miracles, enchantment before which all magic palls—stunted, and shrivelled from lack of nutriment and exercise, like a baby-farmed infant's body? A few hundreds or thousands, more or less; a sufficiency of clothes and food; a surety against poverty; and the possibly fully-developed son of the immortal, "a little lower than the angels," remains hopeless, contracted, with the mind of an untaught child plus an experience of the more obvious forms of dissipation!

The rude meal concluded, and the pannikins refilled, Ernest, as usual, felt sufficiently refreshed in spirit to examine his immediate materials. Mr. Baldacre smoked and talked unreservedly for a couple of hours; explained the presence of the sheepskins—they had been butchering for the diggers lately; described some of their pioneer life, including an adventure with a bushranger, the famous Captain Belville; and, finally, thought Ernest might like to 'turn in.'

Mr. Neuchamp looked distrustfully at the rude wooden frame, upon which sheepskins did duty for a mattress, and a pair of highly uninteresting blankets represented all other description of bedclothes. He protected himself against all nocturnal dangers by retaining the larger proportion of his habiliments, and desperately committed himself to the uncertainty. At earliest dawn he might have been seen leading Osmund towards the hut, after which he saddled up with unusual energy and care. He then betook himself to a grand deep waterhole at no great distance in the creek, where he swam and disported himself for half an hour at least, after which he indulged temperately in the pleasures of the table, as represented by a breakfast which was the facsimile of supper, and immediately thereafter bade his host good-bye, thanking him for his entertainment, and bidding farewell to the abode of Baldacre Brothers for ever.

Mr. Neuchamp smiled to himself when fairly on his way, thinking of the days of his inexperience, when he believed that all squatters, and indeed all colonists, lived in precisely the same fashion, and were characterised by identically the same habits and modes of life.

He certainly had been 'had,' as Mr. Banks would have said, in the matter of trusting himself to the primitive establishment of the Baldacres, who were well known to every one in the district to live 'like blackfellows,' as the phrase ran. But neither he nor Osmund had suffered anything more than slight tem-

porary inconvenience. Mr. Neuchamp was specially good at recovering, and in half an hour he was whistling and humming along the road as blithely as ever.

On this particular day he expected to reach, at an early hour, the abode of another club acquaintance, who had been unaffectedly hearty in impressing upon him the desirability of making his place his headquarters if he ever came to their district. At this house he expected to meet the Indian officer who had so kindly taken care of his Arab steed for him and attended to his comforts on board the P. and O. This distinguished *militaire* had seen a good deal of service, but thirty-five years' exposure to the sun of Hindostan had not quenched his ardour for sport, spoiled his seat on horseback, or cooled his devotion to the fair sex. He had been commissioned by the Indian Government to make large purchases of horses in Australia for remount service, particularly for artillery and heavy cavalry. He was now on a tour of inspection through the chief breeding districts, to the end that the couple of thousand troop horses he was empowered to purchase and ship might do credit to his judgment. Combining, as he did, a frank yet polished address with the prestige of military rank, important services during the Mutiny, consummate knowledge of horseflesh, with a potentiality of unlimited purchase, Colonel Branksome was at that time, perhaps, the most popular man in Australia.

It was on the right side of lunch-time when Mr. Neuchamp found himself opening a neat white gate, at the end of a well-kept drive, which further conducted him to the front door of a stately mansion, with easy circumstances and good taste written in every yard of the well-mown lawn, on every clump of the crowded shrubbery, on the long range of stabling at no inconvenient distance, even in the neat dress and respectful manner of the groom who came to take his horse almost as soon as he had dismounted.

The hall door opened in a spontaneously hospitable manner, and the host, accompanied by a middle-aged man very carefully attired in unmistakable mufti, left no doubt on any one's mind as to his pleasure in receiving him.

'Just in time for lunch, Neuchamp! Very glad you've found your way to our district. The Colonel, here, has just been thrashing me at billiards; let me introduce you: Colonel Branksome—Mr. Neuchamp.

'Happy to meet you,' said the Colonel; 'find the morning hot? Deuced nice horse of yours; you haven't a few like him for sale, have you? I could take a hundred, and pay well too. But, of course, he's a favourite; all the good ones are hereabouts.'

'I am almost sorry to say that he is,' said Ernest, 'since I should have liked to have helped you to a few horses that would have done credit to Australia. I believe I have to thank you for an important service in procuring justice for my Arab on his voyage out.'

'A mere matter of course,' said the Colonel. 'I knew Granby who shipped him, and the old sheik who sold him; personal friend, and all that; besides, I can't see a handsome horse or a pretty woman without taking the strongest interest in their welfare. Weakness of mine all my life. Too old to mend now, I'm afraid.'

'By George! I forgot the lunch,' said the host, looking at his watch. 'Come into my dressing-room, Neuchamp. Billy, you know your way.'

In a few minutes, after a temporary toilette, Ernest found himself in a large cool room, the furniture and arrangements of which betokened no hint of the considerable distance from the metropolis. Two pretty girls, whose complexions told of a cooler climate than that of the coast cities, and drew forth many a compliment from the susceptible warrior, embellished the well-appointed lunch-table. Here, with cool wine, delicate viands, and civilised society, Mr. Neuchamp was enabled utterly to discharge from his mind the unsavoury surroundings of his previous stage. Before they had finished the repast the eldest son of the house came in, apologising for his want of punctuality, but laying the blame upon a large body of miners whom he had been supplying with rations, and who had detained him until their wants were satisfied.

'Really!' said Mr. Branksome, 'the consumption of meat is becoming tremendous. Stock must rise directly. I feared that we were all going to be ruined at first. Now, I see plainly that it will be all the other way.'

'So, then, I suppose I must have made a good bargain in conjunction with Mr. Levison,' affirmed Ernest tentatively.

'Oh! you bought the "bar circle" cattle, then?' said young Branksome. 'They told me they expected a gentleman to take delivery directly. They are the best-bred cattle in this district. You were lucky to buy them.'

'Poor Drifter,' said the old gentleman, 'it was anything but lucky for *him* that he was forced to sell them. I told him that he was hasty, but he was full of visions of their being killed and driven away right and left by the mining population, and would not hear reason.'

'The miners are very decent fellows, what I have seen of them,' said the son. 'Of course there will be all sorts among them; but he would have no greater risk of losing his cattle at their hands than with many others.'

'Not so bad as Sepoys, eh, Billy?' said the host; 'and yet I suppose you trusted the villains to the last minute.'

'Well, I did,' said the Colonel, 'and I'm not ashamed to say so; and so would you if you had seen them fight and die by your side for many a year as I had done. There were some splendid fellows among them—"true to their salt" to the last. It was a great chance that I wasn't shot down by my own men, like Howard and Weston, and many other commanding officers.'

'How did you escape, uncle?' said one of the young ladies, deeply interested.

'Well, I'd been out at daylight with a scratch pack of hounds hunting jackals. Just as I was coming in, the old havildar (I had saved his life once) came rushing out: "No go home, sahib," he said, "men all mad since chupatties come; shot Captain, sahib, Lieutenant, sahib, Major, sahib, and his men, sahib, hide away. Ride away, sahib." And he hung on to my horse's rein.

"Let me go, you old fool," I said, "I must go back; the men will hear *me*. It's those rascally Brahmins."

"You give life, sahib, you do no good," he cried out, and, by Jove! the tears *did* roll down his face. "I give my life for the Colonel, sahib, if he please. All no use. Look there!" and he pointed to where a long line of flame was rising up from my bungalow and stable.

"Where's Lady Jane?" I roared; "you don't mean to tell me they've taken her? I won't leave *her* if I die for it."

"Lukehmeen syce, he very good man, he go away with Lady Jane this morning; go away to Raneepore. She all safe."

"By Jove," I said, "that's good news. If Lady Jane was there now, I believe I should have gone in among the rascally Pandies with my sword and revolver, and seen it out."

'How brave of you, Uncle William,' said one of the girls, her cheeks glowing and her lips trembling with excitement, as she gazed admiringly at the Colonel's hawk nose and bright blue eyes, which nearly matched his turquoise ring. 'And did the poor lady escape altogether?'

'Lady?' said the latter-day Paladin, in tones of astonishment. 'Lady Jane was a thoroughbred English mare that I'd just given three hundred for, worse luck, for I never did see her again, or any of my goods and chattels, from that day to this.'

'And what did you do then, uncle?' said the other sister, the humane sympathiser with Lady Jane being too much astonished and discomposed to continue the examination.

'I was on my old Arab, Roostoom, luckily,' said the Colonel, 'a horse known all over India. When I saw there was nothing for it, I turned his head straight across country for Delhi, and after missing a few shots, rode one hundred and thirty miles before I stopped. Next morning I fell in with a troop of irregular horse of Jacob's, and stayed with them till we entered Delhi together at the Cashmere gate. I say, we have squared accounts with the Pandies; and I thought we were going to ride over to the diggings after lunch.'

Accordingly, about three o'clock, behold the whole party, including the two young ladies and Mr. Neuchamp, mounted and cantering along the extremely well-marked road which led to the mining township of Turonia. The young ladies rode with grace and spirit upon well-groomed, well-bred horses,

drawing forth many encomiums from the horse-loving and gallant Colonel, who said that their steeds would fetch a thousand rupees in Calcutta, and the young ladies receive half a dozen proposals of marriage the very first day they appeared on the Maidan.

The young ladies, in return, declared that there was only one man in the district to be compared to their uncle ; and as he sat with easy military seat upon a strikingly handsome thoroughbred bay, with a star, the whole affair, from the well-brushed hat to lower spur-leather, 'exquisite as a piece of lace,' he justified their appreciation. As they neared the widely-extended collection of huts, shafts, heaps of mullock, and imposing structures of weatherboard and iron, thronged with a stalwart army, ten thousand strong, of bronzed and bearded gold-miners, they were joined by a semi-military-looking personage, dressed in uniform not all devoid of gold lace, and followed by a highly efficient-looking, well-mounted trooper.

'Ha ! Stanley,' said Mr. Branksome, 'well met ; how do you do ? This is my friend, Mr. Frank Stanley, the Commissioner of the goldfield. Allow me to introduce you to him. Are your subjects peaceable enough to venture among ; and how does the escort get on ?'

'I will answer for my diggers,' said Mr. Stanley, bowing to the young ladies, 'being the most genuinely polite people in the world, especially to ladies ; and the escort was a little over ten thousand ounces last week.'

'You don't say so ?' said Mr. Branksome ; 'three thousand ounces more than last week. Why, how much do you intend to get at by the end of the year ?'

'Several rich leads have been discovered lately,' said the Commissioner, with a slight air of importance. 'If they find a deeper deposit below the basalt, as many of the experienced miners think likely, we shall eclipse California.'

'How very interesting,' said Mr. Neuchamp, much excited by proximity to a novel and recent development of colonial industry ; 'I suppose you find great difficulty in managing such an immense and disorderly concourse.'

'If they were disorderly we simply could not manage them,' said the representative of the Queen's Government. 'We have about an average of one constable to a thousand men. Moral force, applied with discretion and firmness, suffices for all purposes of rule and coercion. Besides, the miners, as a rule, are well-educated men, and such populations are always manageable.'

'Why so ?' inquired Ernest. 'I should have thought that they were easily led away by designing persons.'

'The contrary is the case,' said the experienced proconsul. 'Without stating that there are always among the miners gentlemen and graduates of the university, a considerable proportion consists of well-educated, travelled, sagacious men.'

These leaven the mass ; and having strong convictions themselves upon all subjects, they are amenable to argument—to logic—which comprehends justice. It is an ignorant population which follows the demagogue like sheep ; it is the uncultivated mind which is at the mercy of every specious lie which is offered to it.'

'Then crime is rare,' said Ernest, 'and offences against life and property uncommon?'

'Taking the numbers, one may aver, with safety, that crime is exceedingly infrequent. At the same time I cannot deny that the police charges are tolerably numerous. But in case of serious offences we have the main body of miners on the side of law and order, and the criminal rarely eludes the arm of the law.'

By this time they had neared the outskirts of the town, and Ernest was much pleased with the many neat cottages, surrounded by trim gardens, which they passed. Among these stood an exceedingly small but faultlessly neat dwelling, surrounded by a garden filled with vegetables the profuse growth of which was due to a small stream of water which had been ingeniously led from the neighbouring hills. The owner, whose attire, though suitable for working, was marked by the exceptional neatness which pervaded the establishment, leaned upon his spade and gazed calmly upon the *cortège* as it passed along the winding forest track.

'How pleasant a sight it is,' said Ernest, 'to see one man, at least, superior to the mad thirst for gold which is common to this eager population. How contentedly that gardener devotes himself to the occupation in which he has probably passed his former life, and which, without holding out any splendid prize, no doubt provides him with a certain and ample subsistence.'

'I should say,' said Mr. Branksome, 'that your recluse has probably lost his all at a gold venture, and is from circumstances compelled to rusticate, literally, until he makes a fresh start.'

The Goldfields Commissioner smiled, but made no remark, as he rode close up to the palings of the garden and reined in his horse.

The gardener left his work and advanced to the fence, apparently to hold converse with the important official—a man at that time possessed of enormous power and irresponsible control.

'Hallo, De Bracy !' said the latter, 'how are you getting on ? Weather too hot for the green peas ? Asparagus pretty forward ?'

'Shocking weather, altogether,' said the horticulturist, advancing to the barrier and shaking hands with the Commissioner. 'If it were not for my irrigation I should be ruined and undone. Splendid thing, water !'

The Colonel and Ernest, with the young ladies, had by this time ridden close up, and were regarding the somewhat exceptional 'grower,' whose sunburnt hands exhibited much delicacy of shape and careful treatment, while his extremely handsome face and figure told unmistakably of long acquaintance with the *haute volée* of the world's best society.

'Are you going to the bachelors' ball to-morrow night?' asked the Commissioner. 'Great muster, and no end of young ladies.'

'Well, I may look in for an hour if I can get these cauliflowers properly earthed up in time,' said this anomalous member at once of the gay and workaday world. 'You know the season is so forward that I dare not give them another hour.'

'Great God!' said the Colonel, 'why, it's De Bracy! Why, Brian, old boy, what, in the name of all that is impossible, brings you here?'

Ernest turned at the exclamation, and saw that the Colonel's bold features had changed, and were working like those of a man who sees some visitant from the silent land—is confronted by an unreal presence that stirs his inmost soul and curdles the very life blood.

The young ladies stand, pale with surprise.

'Oh, it's you, Billy Branks,' said the provider of esculents. 'Come down from India? Nearly as hot here, eh? Well, I lost all my money in mining enterprises; the finest substitute for unlimited loo I ever fell across. And having absolutely nothing, and being far from the land of friends, bill discounts, and outfitters, why, I took to gardening. *Il faut vivre*, you know; and I was always fond of dabbling in amateur handicrafts.'

'Splendid life, beautiful weather, not too cold; shouldn't mind it a bit; make heaps of money, I'm sure!' said the Colonel incoherently. 'But oh! Brian, old fellow, I never thought I should see you *working* for your living.'

'Why not, my dear boy?' said the philosopher of the spade coolly. 'What does the old Roman poet say—*furcae amor honestus est et liber*—stick to your knife and fork, and all that. Horace has no doubt on the subject. This is my Sabine farm, and there is the Fons Bandusiae, for a time—glad to say—at any rate, for a time—the pre-remittance stage. It's safer than billiards, and more creditable than whist—as a livelihood.'

'True, by Jove!' said the Colonel, 'most honourable and all that. But the fellows at the Rag would never believe it, if I go back and tell them that I saw Brian de Bracy growing vegetables and living by it, by gad.'

'Tell 'em every word of it, Billy, old boy,' said the wholly unabashed and true descendant of Adam, squaring his shoulders and displaying his symmetrical figure. 'Tell some of them to come out and try their luck here. It will do them a lot of good, make men of them, and keep them away from the bones.'

‘Certainly, certainly,’ assented the Colonel, hopelessly confused. ‘Most likely they’ll all come. Charming climate, splendid salad, and so on. Well, good-bye, old man. Sorry to see you looking so well. Oh lord! why didn’t the French Count kill you instead of your winging *him*, in that row about Ferraris, and stop this. Good gad!’

So saying, the warm-hearted warrior wrenched away his horse’s head and departed along the homeward track, inconsolable for at least a quarter of an hour, at the expiration of which time he unburdened his soul to the nearest niece as follows:—

‘Awful thing! poor Brian, wasn’t it? By gad, when I first recognised him, thought I should have fallen off my horse. Last time I saw him he was coming out of the ‘Travellers’, in London, with a duke on one arm and the commander-in-chief on the other. Awful fuss always made about him. No swell within miles of him—at Ascot, Goodwood, and so on. Women reg’lar fought about him—handsomest man of his day. Shoot, ride, fence, everything, better than the best of the amateurs. And now, what’s he down to? By gad! it makes a baby of me.’ And the honest, kindly veteran looked as if a cambric handkerchief would have afforded him great comfort and relief under the circumstances.

‘Never mind, uncle,’ said the sympathising maiden, ‘you’ll see him at the ball to-morrow night, and I’ll dance with him—not that there’s much charity in that. You know how nicely he looks at night. There won’t be a man there to be compared with him.’

‘Of course I’ll go,’ said the Colonel, recovering himself as became a soldier, ‘and you may look me out a nice girl or two for a waltz. I don’t *think* I ever went to a ball at a diggings before.’

CHAPTER XXII

A PLEASANT ride home in the cool of the evening, comprising some æsthetic talk on the part of Ernest with the youngest daughter, and a sensational bit of horsemanship by the Colonel, who rode his horse over a stiff three-railer that Miss Branksome had denounced as dangerous, prepared the party for a very merry dinner, after which some dressing set in, and the whole party started for the ball in a high mail phaeton.

The mining township of Turonia, while tolerably open to criticism by day as to its architecture, with the kindly aid of shadow and moonbeam looked sufficiently imposing by night, with its long line of lighted street, its clanking engines and red-gleaming shift-fires.

The particular night chosen for the entertainment which the bachelors temporarily dwelling in and around the golden city of Turonia had provided, was of the clearest moonlight procurable. Undimmed, awful, golden, pure, in the wondrous dark-blue dome, glowed the thrones of the greater and the lesser kings of the night. The trees upon the swart hillsides were visible in fullest delicate tracery of leaf and branch, as at midday. Each trail in the red dusty roadpaths showed with magic pencilling of outline. The dark-mouthed cruel shafts, which lay as if watching for a prey on either side of the narrow roadway, were plainly visible to the most careless wayfarer. So it chanced that from cottage and villa, from farmhouse and home station, and even from less pretentious habitations than any of these, wended at the usual hour a concourse of joyous or pleasure-enduring visitants, not specially distinguishable in air, manner, or raiment from metropolitan devotees of similar tenets.

Pretty Mrs. Merryfield was there, whose husband, formerly in the navy, held as many shares in the Haul and Belay Reef as would at that time have enabled him to retire upon club life and whist for the rest of his days. Managing Mrs. Campion with her three daughters (Janie Campion was not unlikely to be voted the belle of the evening) sailed in, imposing with bouquets all the way from Sydney, the fern sprigs, camellias, and moss rosebuds of which were marvels of freshness. Little

Campion and his partner, George Bowler, were driving a roaring trade as auctioneers, and a cheque for fifty for the girls' dresses and fal-lals was, he was pleased to say, 'neither here nor there.' The doctors, half a dozen, were chiefly married men, and contributed their full share to the feminine contingent. So did the four lawyers. Mining cases are perhaps the most interminable, complicated, and technical known in the records of litigation. The bankers were in great force and profusion. In mining towns they are necessarily numerous and competitive, and there are few departments of social accomplishments to which they may not lay claim. Thus many were the celebrities contributed by them that night—athletic champions, musical bankers, and bankers that danced, bankers that billiardied and whisted, bankers that 'went in for beauty' and preserved their complexions, and bankers that combined divers of these claims to consideration. In a general way it may be assumed that the *jeunesse dorée* of that inevitable profession numbers as many 'good all-round men' as could be taken at hazard from either of the services, military or naval—the metropolitan young-lady vote notwithstanding. Our ball yet had some distinctive features. Many of the irreproachably attired persons, there and then present, had spent the day in avocations which do not in a general way precede ball going. Jack Hardston had worked his own eight hours 'shift' that day, from 8 A.M. to 4 o'clock in the afternoon, in a 'drive' of considerable lateral penetration, at a distance of 160 feet from 'upper air.' After a light repast, a smoke, a swim in the Turonia, and a somewhat protracted and hazardous toilette, he asserted himself to be wound up exactly to concert pitch. Twice as fit indeed as when he carried the money of the men for the grand military pedestrian handicap. Mild little Mrs. Wynne had treated herself to the ball on the strength of Lloyd Watkyn having come 'on the gutter' in his claim at Jumper's Gully in the early part of the week. So she finished up her baking and brewing, let us say, and having handed over the three-year-old Watkyn Williams, with many injunctions, to her neighbour Mrs. David Jones (also of the Principality), proceeded with her husband, 'dressed for once like old times,' as she said with a little sigh, to the hall of the great enchanter—even music—who hath power over body and soul, life and limb; who with a chord can call forth the tears of the past, the joys of the present. And very nice they looked.

Horace Sherrington was there—suave, correct, rather worn-looking, but incontestably 'good form.' He made a handsomer income by the exercise of his talents than those somewhat varied natural gifts had ever previously afforded him. Every evening he came to the camp mess, where the Government officials kept something like open house for all pleasant fellows who were 'of ours' in the former or the latter time. No one sang so good a song as Sherrington, was so racy a *raconteur*,

played a better hand at whist, had a surer cue at pool. But no one knew precisely how he spent his day, not that any one cared much. There were too many men of mark who had tried every employment on that goldfield for luck and honest bread, including the officials themselves, for them to affect any snobbish discrimination of avocations. But Horace did not volunteer the nature of his daily duties; he was not a miner, a speculator, a reefer, nor an engine-driver, a clerk, or puddler. His reticence piqued them. One day the police inspector's horse shied at a man in a loose blue shirt and very clay-stained general rig, having also an immense sheaf of posters in his hand. 'What the devil do you mean, my man, by flourishing these things in my horse's face?' growled the somewhat shaken autocrat. 'Beg your pardon, sir,' quoth the agent of intelligence, himself passing on. But it was too late. The lynx-eye settled upon him with unerring aim, like a backwoodsman's rifle. Both men burst out laughing. The elegant and accomplished Horace was a bill-sticker! The festive concourse partook, in one respect at least, of classical and traditionary fitness. The sincere and fervid worshippers of Terpsichore held sacred revel in a temple. The Temple of Justice! For the large handsomely decorated hall, which resounded with the inspiring clangour of a very passable brass band, was in good earnest the court-house of Turonia. By the simple process of removing the dock and draping the witness-box as a lamp stand, placing the musicians upon the magisterial bench, with, I hardly need to mention, a profuse exhibition of international bunting, a fairly ornamental and highly effective ballroom was secured.

It was generally believed, and indeed asserted by the *Turonia Sentinel*, that the Commissioner, who was known to be *beau valseur*, had bribed the contractor, when completing that magnificent edifice, to bestow extra finish upon the flooring, with ulterior views as to its utilisation for society purposes. Be that as it may—and much gossip was current about that high and mighty official of which he took no heed—there *was* some truth in a subsequent legend that a prisoner and the constable by whom he was being escorted to the dock on the following morning slipped and fell as heavily and unexpectedly upon the glassy floor as if they had been essaying the gliding graces of the rink for the first time.

When the Branksome Hall party drove up, the entertainment had commenced, and the two first dances having been got through, the *gêne* of all beginnings and early arrivals was evaded. The ladies having been first conducted for envelope-removing purposes into the jury-room, and the men's overcoats and wideawakes deposited in the land office, the stewards with elaborate courtesy escorted them to the hall of dazzling delight.

The Commissioner, in blue and gold (at that period of Australian history these officials wore uniforms), looked most

military and distinguished, his heavy drab moustache and decided cast of countenance suiting the costume extremely well. The second steward was a broad-shouldered, blonde, blue-eyed personage, whose singular talent for organisation caused his services to be in great request at all public demonstrations—social, military, legal, or ecclesiastical. He looked like a squatter or a naval man, but was in reality a bank manager. The third steward was a tall handsome man, very carefully attired, whose delicate features were partly concealed by an immense fair beard. His manner, his mien, his every look and gesture, told as plainly as words to any observer of his kind of foreign travel, of 'the service' in early life of that occasional entire dependence upon personal resources which has been roughly translated as 'living by his wits.' On his brow was the imprint writ large, in spite of the faultless toilette, finished courtesy, the perfect *aplomb*, the half-unconscious *fierté* of his manner, the somewhat doubtful *affiche* of adventurer.

Attended by these magnates, for whom way was made with ready respect, the Hall party sailed into the well-lighted, well-filled room with considerable prestige.

Ernest was considerably astonished at the general appearance of matters, while the Colonel openly expressed his admiration and satisfaction.

'Gad, sir!' he said to the Commissioner, 'I had no idea that you were able to get up your dances in this fashion. What a field of neat well-bred-looking flyers—I mean deuced pretty girls, and monstrously well dressed too. Puts me in mind of one of our Hurryghur dances. We used to have such jolly spurts at the old station before that cursed Mutiny spoiled everything.'

Mr. Neuchamp thought it was not so very much less imposing in appearance than a ball in Sydney; room not so big; perhaps a trifling flavour of the provinces.

But the Bombay galop having struck up, the Colonel possessed himself of a partner of prepossessing appearance, through the good offices of the Commissioner, and sailed off at a great pace. Ernest lost no time in appropriating the eldest Miss Branksome, and reflection was merged in sensation.

'I suppose you hardly expected to have any ball-going in this particular spot,' said he to his partner, 'a few years ago.'

'We should just as soon have expected to go to the opera and hear Tietjens,' said Miss Branksome. 'I have often ridden over this very spot with papa, and seen the wild horses feeding on the hill where the town now stands.'

'And you like the change?'

'I can't say that we did at first. We fancied, I suppose, that the great invading army of diggers would eat us up, and we resented their intrusion. But they turned out very amiable wild beasts, and one advantage we certainly did not calculate upon.'

‘What is that, may I ask?’

‘The number of nice people that would accompany the army. Our society is ten times as large and pleasant as in old times. We are hardly a night without quite a small party of visitors. You see there are the commissioners, magistrates, bankers, and other officials, all gentlemen and mostly pleasant. Besides, the gold attracts visitors, like yourself, for instance.’

After a very satisfactory fast and unaffectedly performed galop, the susceptible Colonel joined them at the refreshment table, accompanied by a young lady with a wild-rose complexion and great dark eyes, who had been evidently dancing at a pace which had caused that mysterious portion of her *chevelure* known (I am informed) as ‘back hair’ to fall in glossy abundance over her fair shoulders.

‘Splendid floor, Bessy,’ he said to his niece. ‘Capital music—partner beyond all praise!’ (Here the young lady looked up with smiling reproach.) ‘Fact! haven’t had such a dance since the last ball at Calcutta. There were two duels next day—about a young lady, of course’ (here the small damsel looked much concerned)—‘and poor O’Grady, who had heart complaint, but couldn’t control his feelings at a ball, died within the week.’

‘Oh, how dreadful!’ said the little maiden, with a sincere accent of distress. ‘But nobody dies after a ball here, or fights duels either, that I ever heard of. Why should they in India, Colonel Branksome?’

‘Can’t say,’ said the Colonel. ‘Let me give you a little champagne; heat of the climate, I suppose; too many soldiers, too few ladies.’

‘India must be a beautiful place, Colonel Branksome,’ observed the grave little damsel, looking out of her big eyes with an air of deliberate conviction.

‘Glorious, splendid; that is, most infernal hole—hot, dull, miserable—full of niggers. Hope I may never stay another year in it. Get my pension, I hope, when I get back and settle up with the remount agent. After that, if they ever catch Billy Branksome out of England again, they may make a Punkah-wallah of him.’

‘Good gracious, Colonel Branksome!’ said the matter-of-fact danseuse, who now looked as cool as if she had been walking a minuet. ‘I thought all soldiers were fond of India. Oh! there’s that dear old Captain de Bracy.’

‘Gad! so it is,’ said the Colonel. ‘Look at him, Bessy, strolling in, and bowing to every woman he knows, as if he was at a ball at the Tuileries. Gad! I *did* see him there last. And what do you think he was doing?—why dancing in a set with two crowned heads and four princesses of the blood. He and Charles Standish made up the set; by gad!’

‘Oh, doesn’t he look like a nobleman?’ said the *debutante* enthusiastically, opening her innocent eyes and feasting on De

Bracy's middle-aged charms. 'And oh, what lovely, wonderful studs!'

'So you're here, Master Billy, as usual?' said the object of this highly favourable criticism. 'Couldn't keep away from a ball if your life depended upon it. Old enough to know better, ain't he, Miss Maybell? Happy to see you all here to-night. Not afraid of the stumps and holes? I'm well enough, thanks, Miss Maybell, heard *you* were coming; and though I seldom go out now—I am here.'

'Oh, Captain de Bracy!' said little Miss Maybell, perfectly overwhelmed with the compliment to her unworthy small self (as she erroneously held, underrating her fresh and innocent beauty), and mentally comparing De Bracy's appearance with that of a print of the Chevalier Bayard which was among her treasures at home.

A great tidal wave of promenading couples overwhelmed and dispersed the *partie-carrée* for a while, so that they were compelled to make arrangements for the next dance, which happened to be a *deux-temps* waltz. Having relinquished Miss Branksome to De Bracy, and seen pretty little Miss Maybell carried off by young Tom Branksome, who recommended his uncle to try Mrs. Champion, as being a fine woman and of a suitable age, Ernest found, rather to his surprise, that he was a little late, as every possible partner for a fast dance had been secured. The fact was, that the proportion of the sexes was in the inverse ratio to what generally obtains at balls in a more settled state of society. Therefore, more than average alacrity and foresight was necessary to ensure a regular succession of partners.

As Mr. Neuchamp, smiling to himself at his involuntary state of injured feelings, sauntered towards the refreshment room, he met the steward, who had been introduced to him by the Commissioner as Mr. Lionel Greffham.

'You don't seem to be dancing,' he said; 'well, it is rather a bore, after the first turn or two. Bright and I are having a glass of champagne; will you join us?—it is "number two."'

There was such an evident desire to be civil on Mr. Greffham's part that Ernest, who had not at first regarded him with perfect approval, felt moved to respond to so friendly an accost. He found Mr. Bright in the supper room, in conversation with a well-dressed, quiet, but not the less striking-looking personage, who was introduced as the district inspector of police, Mr. Merlin.

'What do you think of society on the diggings?' said Mr. Bright to Ernest; 'hardly what you would have expected?'

'It is utterly wonderful,' said Ernest. 'I am perfectly amazed at the order and decorum which everywhere prevail, and even at the elegant and enjoyable party to-night—so many nice people you seem to have.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Merlin, 'nothing is more wonderful, as you

say. There *are* so many extremely nice people here. So well worth knowing. People who have such noble, disinterested views, eh, Greffham?’

‘I quite agree with you,’ answered that gentleman. ‘But it’s rather a bore we can’t have a little whist, isn’t it? A quiet rubber, or a game at billiards, would be much more sensible than all this capering with a lot of people that, in any other part of the world, you wouldn’t dream of speaking to.’

‘Surely not,’ said Ernest; ‘some of our friends here are of unimpeachable *ton*, and for the rest they appear to be of very fair average standing. I am very much pleased with the whole affair.’

‘Greffham is fastidious, and plays the Sybarite among his other characters,’ said the inspector slowly and distinctly. ‘He suffers much here when the rose leaves are unavoidably crumpled. So much depends upon a man’s antecedents.’

‘I don’t know that I am more fastidious than others,’ he said, smiling, though the eye, that infallible referee in facial expression, did not agree with his amused expression. ‘You know that *you*, Master Merlin, rather agree with me than otherwise. But, seriously, suppose we go over to the Occidental and have a game of billiards. Oceans of time; these misguided Turonians will dance for hours yet.’

The proposition met with general approval, and Mr. Neuchamp assented, not that he cared about billiards, at which he was only a middling performer, but he felt the inexplicable influence of the strange scene and novel surroundings, and was more inclined than ordinarily *desipere in loco*.

The four acquaintances crossed the street, which was filled, as far as they could see, with a surging crowd of men, chiefly attired in the ordinary dress of miners. Shops brilliantly lighted, and of imposing appearance as to their fronts, lined the long, narrow, and not altogether straight street. Mr. Neuchamp thought he had never seen such an assemblage of intelligent-looking men. Evidently the flower of the working classes, while from all the trades and professions a large proportion had been lured to Turonia by the golden possibilities of the great rush. What amazed Ernest chiefly was the astonishing order and polite behaviour of this vast concourse of people, containing presumably the ruffianism of all lands under the sun. He had seen mobs in the British towns and cities and in other parts of the world. In all these gatherings he had occasionally encountered rough usage, had heard much foul language, and had suffered risk or loss of personal belongings.

But in this strange crowd, no conduct other than of mutual respect and courtesy was observable. Rarely a word to which objection could be taken fell on the ear. The press parted and permitted the four gentlemen to walk through as independently as though they were the Dowager Patroness at a charitable institution. The brilliantly-lighted bars at the numerous hotels

were certainly full, but there seemed to be more talking than consumption of liquor, and the spectacle of drunken men was altogether absent. A few police constables, unobtrusively placed, denoted that the Imperial Government, so calm, so impartial, yet so long of arm and sure of grasp, was represented. Otherwise it looked very much as if the great heterogeneous mass of humanity, now turning up the precious metal at Turonia at the rate of a couple of tons of gold per quarter, was permitted to manage itself. This was by no means the case, as Mr. Merlin could have explained. An unsparing crusade was organised against all manner of open vice and crime. No quarter was given or respite permitted. Passing through the bar, among the occupants of which Ernest did not observe any one to carry a revolver, or to make as though the good-humoured landlord was likely to be, without notice, 'one of the deadest men that ever lived,' they reached a large, well-lighted room, where two handsome new billiard tables were in full swing. As they sat down on the cushioned benches which lined the room, a young fellow in a blue shirt and clay-stained trousers made a break of twenty-seven, and thereby won the game in a style which showed that he had not devoted all his life to mining industry. The marker promptly signalled to Mr. Greffham. He and Ernest then took possession of the vacated table.

There is no doubt that at certain times an electrical tone pervades not only the physical but the moral atmosphere, affecting to depression or exaltation the mind of man, that subtle reflex of the most delicate external influence. Such a night was this. The music of the band was pealing from the opposite side of the street—the vast, surging, excited, but self-contained crowd presented the strangest contrasts of society, so akin to the rudest types of life in certain aspects, so near to Utopian models in advanced manners and intelligent consent. Even the scraps of conversation which found their way to Ernest's ear were of a novel and fairy-legendary nature.

'Made eight hundred pounds in ten days out of that bit of "surface," Jem did; I sold a share in Green Gully, No. 5, for three drinks last week, and now they've struck gold and want a thousand for it. Commissioner settled that dispute to-day at Eaglehawk.'

'Who got number seven block?'

'Well, Red Bill, and his crowd; it's on good gold too.'

'What did Big George say?'

'Oh, he was pretty wild, but he couldn't do nothing, of course.'

'I'll take three hundred and half out of the ground for a share in number two,' and so on, and so on.

Mr. Neuchamp had come on to the long-disputed territory, 'Tom Tidler's ground,' and the 'demnition gold' (if not silver) was sticking out of the soil everywhere. Ten-pound notes

were handed across the bar for change as readily as half-crowns. Nuggets worth from £50 to £100 were passed about in the crowd for inspection with the most undoubting good faith and confidence in the collective honesty of mining mankind.

Under these conditions, it was a night for bold and reckless conception, a night when the ordinary prudences and severities of conscience might be calmly placed behind the perceptions, and the 'fore-soul' be permitted to leap forth and disport in the glorious freedom of the instincts and original faculties.

No sooner had Ernest handled his cue and struck the first ball than he perceived that he was in one of his rarely happy veins, when, sure of his play, he was also likely to fall in for an unusual allowance of 'flukes.' Therefore, when Greffham, who had kindly allowed him ten points, proposed to have a pound on the game, just for the fun of the thing, he promptly acceded.

He won the first with ease, Mr. Greffham playing a steady but by no means brilliant game. And, much to his astonishment, the second also, with a couple of pounds which he had staked, with the good-natured intention of giving back Mr. Greffham his money. Ernest did not win the second game quite so easily, but his luck adhered to him, and a shower of flukes at the latter end landed him the winner. His antagonist bore his defeat with the finest breeding and perfect composure, deciding that it was quite a pleasure to meet with a gentleman in this howling desert, socially, who *could* play, and trusting that they might have another game or two before Ernest left the district. Then Mr. Bright and the inspector had a short but brilliant game, chiefly remarkable for the sparkling, if somewhat acidulated, repartee which it called forth. Then it was voted proper to return to the ball-room. Here matters had apparently reached the after-supper stage. The dancing was more determined, the floor smooth to the last degree of perfection. De Bracy, the Commissioner, the Colonel, and the Branksome Hall party were still untired, unsatiated — the cheeks of the young ladies showed paler in the growing dawn-light, their eyes larger and more bright, and the hair of little Miss Maybell positively 'would not keep up, and there was no use trying to make it.' Ernest was just sufficiently fortunate to capture Miss Janie Campion for the galop, which proved to be the concluding one as far as he was concerned. For old Mr. Branksome, not being quite so fond of dancing and young ladies as his gallant brother, ordered the phaeton round, and caused his daughters to perceive that he wished to go home, without any kind of doubt or hesitation.

So all wraps being secured, and the Colonel having taken a most tender leave of his last partner, the highly-conditioned horses went at their collars, and, after threading the unabated crowd, rattled along the smooth if winding track, by stumps, ditches, and yawning shafts, at a pace which with luck and

good driving brought them in due time safe and sleepy to the avenue gate of Branksome Hall.

On the following morning Ernest received a letter from Charley Banks, by which he learned that his party would not arrive in the neighbourhood of Turonia for at least another fortnight—their advance being unavoidably slow. He cheerfully concluded, therefore, to spend the intervening time in the golden city, where he would have an opportunity of noticing the preparations for mustering the herd, in which he and Mr. Levison were jointly interested, and of acquiring new facts in a tolerably new field of observation.

He therefore took temporary leave of his very kind friends at the Hall, reserving to himself the right of occasional visits until he should depart, with his newly-acquired herd, for the 'waste lands of the Crown,' where the Great River flowed on, as in the long lonely æons of the past, through the vast plains and pine-bordered sandhills of Rainbar.

Once domiciled in Turonia, Mr. Neuchamp found its society more various and entertaining than in any locality other than the metropolis which he had visited since his arrival in Australia. It was the flush and prosperous stage of a great alluvial goldfield. All things wore the golden tint, all bore the image and superscription of the modern Cæsar and Imperator.

Wonderfully unreal, and smacking of 'the golden prime of the good Haroun Alraschid,' was the careless magnificence with which large sums of money were acquired, spent, lost, and regained. Ernest visited the various banks, and saw bags and drawers in which the precious metal lay heaped in all forms, from the dull red heavy dust to the lump, ingots, and precious fragments, in which a thousand pounds' worth was lifted in the hand with as much ease as a paperweight. He saw the bronzed, stalwart miners handing insignificant-looking bags across the cedar counters, and crushing handfuls of ten-pound notes into their pockets as a schoolboy receives change for a shilling spent in marbles. He retired to rest about midnight, and on awaking at dawn heard the ceaseless click of the billiard balls in the adjacent saloon, apparently fated to go on until the day again merged into midnight. He found the *table-d'hôte* every day filled, not to say crowded, by well-dressed people whose occupation he could at first merely guess at, but whom he found to be in nearly every case connected with the great industry—as officials, mine-owners, brokers, speculators, professional men, and others unspecified, with perhaps a rare tourist, lured hither by astounding rumours, or a feeling of justifiable curiosity, to behold the unbounded treasures of mother earth, so long and jealously guarded. There was a never-failing store of amusement and occupation spread out before the calibre of Mr. Neuchamp, and so absorbed did he grow daily in the ever-widening field of observation that he

felt almost regretful to find the time at his disposal rapidly diminishing.

In no more friendly and hospitable region had he ever sojourned. He was voted an acquisition by the officials, and made free of all their small gatherings and merry meetings. One day the Commissioner would drive him out to inspect a great sluicing claim, where the water, brought through races by miles of fluming, spouted clear and strong over heaps of auriferous earth, as when it left its far-away mountain rill. On another occasion he was invited to witness the hearing and settlement of a great mining dispute, 'on the ground,' where a thousand excited men were gathered—the evidence heard upon oath, and the immutable decision of the Lord High Commissioner given, by which the one moiety was deprived of all right to a presumable fortune, and the other gifted with a clear title to the same. Much temporary excitement and even irritation was produced by each and every such verdict. But miners, as a rule, are a law-abiding body; and, the mining laws of the period being as those of the Medes and Persians, all effervescence, however apparently allied to physical force, rapidly subsides.

In the intervals of such experiences and recreations, Mr. Neuchamp did not abstain from joining in diurnal billiard tournaments, and the nightly whist parties, in which trials of chance and skill he invariably found himself associated with Mr. Lionel Greffham and other pleasant persons, who, appearing to have no visible means of subsistence, were invariably well dressed, well appointed, and well provided with the needful cash. Mr. Greffham constituted himself his constant companion and mentor; the charm of his unremitting courtesy, joined to varied and racy experiences with a never-failing flow of entertaining conversation, gradually broke down Ernest's caution and reserve. They became, if not sworn friends, habitual acquaintances, and under his apparently disinterested guidance the time passed pleasantly enough. Yet Ernest began to perceive that, after the first few successes, his losings at cards and billiards commenced to add up to more serious totals than he had thought possible at the commencement of his sojourn at Turonia.

More than once Ernest fancied that the keen eyes of Mr. Merlin wore a depreciatory, not to say contemptuous, expression when fixed upon Mr. Greffham. The Commissioner evidently disapproved of him in a general way, and Mr. Bright, who was open and bold of speech, once took occasion to remark, *à propos* of the elegant but inscrutable Lionel, that he considered him 'to be a d—d scoundrel, who would stick at *nothing* in the way of villainy, if he had anything considerable to gain by it.' But at this stage Ernest, at no time of a distrustful disposition, had formed an estimate of this fascinating free-lance too favourable to be shaken by mere assertion unsupported by proof.

One morning, for some reason, an unusually large amount of gold and notes was despatched from one of the banks, with the object of meeting a branch escort a day's ride from Turonia. Two troopers were detached for this service. They carried the compact but precious burden before them in valises strapped to their saddles.

A small group of *habitués* of the Occidental assembled to witness their departure, and Mr. Neuchamp bestowed much commendation upon the condition of the horses, the efficient appearance of arms and accoutrements, and the soldierly and neat appearance of the men. Curious to remark, Greffham was not among the admiring crowd, and Ernest alluded to the fact to the Inspector of Police, who was officially present.

'What has become of Greffham?' he inquired. 'One would have sworn that we should have seen him here!'

Mr. Merlin replied that 'Mr. Greffham was probably away upon business'; but a bystander volunteered the information that he had seen Mr. Greffham mounted, at daylight, upon his famous hackney Malakoff, apparently on the road to an adjacent diggings.

'Where can he be going, Merlin?' said Ernest. 'He arranged to drive me over to the Hall to-day.'

Mr. Merlin replied, stiffly, that Greffham had apparently changed his mind, and that he, Merlin, had not the slightest acquaintance with Mr. Greffham's business affairs.

Mr. Neuchamp felt quietly repelled by this answer, and the cold indifference with which it was given. He came to the conclusion that Merlin was unnecessarily formal, and by no means so pleasant an acquaintance as the absent one. He was not fated to recover from the effects of his matutinal disappointment.

The Commissioner was up to his eyes in court business that day. Bright was unusually confined to his bank. Merlin disappeared on the trail of a cattle-stealer long and urgently 'wanted,' while every other member of the waif and stray corps, from the police magistrate to Horace Sherrington, seemed to have been snatched away by the Demon of Industry, or otherwise absorbed by abnormal influences. Long, dismal, and cheerless passed the hours of one of those broken, objectless days that are so peculiarly, unaccountably depressing. It was long—very long—since Ernest had spent so miserable a day. He regretted that he had not carried out his intention of visiting the Hall. He wondered when Charley Banks would arrive, and sincerely longed once more for the absorbing work of the muster and the march, telling himself that it would be long before he spent so idle a season again. The evening at length arrived, and with the gathering of the accustomed party at the dinner-table brighter thoughts possessed his mind. By the time that the evening game of billiards had fairly com-

menced, Mr. Neuchamp's equable habitude of mind had reasserted itself.

They had not been long occupied with this fascinating exercise, wonderfully suited to so many shades of character, when Greffham lounged in, calm and *insouciant*, as usual. At the first opening in the game he took his favourite cue and played his usual cool and occasionally brilliant game. If he had been in the saddle the long day through, no trace of more than ordinary exercise or excitement was visible in the *soigné* attire, which seemed a part of the man's being, or on his calm, impassive features. His play differed not in the slightest degree from his ordinary form, which always showed improvement towards the close, with perfect unconsciousness as to whether he was apparently winning or losing the game. He made his customary break, and, betting upon a five stroke at the finish, gave a shade of odds upon the success of his concluding 'coup.' He spoke of a longish ride as far as an out-lying quartz reef, in which he had an interest, and mentioned having encountered the two gold-laden troopers at an inn which they would pass towards the end of their day's journey.

Half an hour later on Mr. Merlin dropped in, by no means so calm in his demeanour as Greffham, and full of complaints as to the abominable nature of the weather, the fleas, the dust, the danger of riding late among unprotected shafts, and many other disagreeables specially selected by fate for his deterioration and disgust on this appointed day.

While in this unchristian state of mind, for which he was mildly taken to task by Greffham, he was called out by a waiter, who informed him that 'a gentleman wished to see him.'

'Oh, certainly,' quoth the unappeased official with sardonic politeness; 'most happy, I'm sure. *I very seldom see one.*'

With this Parthian shaft at the entire 'community, which was accepted as a perfectly permissible and characteristic pleasantry, Mr. Merlin quitted the room to greet the aforesaid rare and precious personage. He did not return; and after a little unlimited loo, in which Mr. Greffham transferred the larger portion of Ernest's ready money to his own pocket, the company separated for the night.

It was moderately early on the morrow when Mr. Neuchamp presented himself in the main street of Turonia. He was at once instinctively aware that something strange had happened.

The ordinary life and labour of the busy human hive seemed arrested. Men stood in groups at the sides, the corners, the centres of the streets, conversing in low tones with bated breath, as it seemed to Ernest. The very air was heavy and laden with horror—unexplained, mysterious—until above the hum and confused murmurs came, ominous and unmistakable, the one darkest irrevocable word 'murder!'

It was even so. Mr. Bright, walking briskly down the street, accosted him, and in the next breath asked if he had heard the news.

'Very dreadful thing—very,' said the sympathising banker, trying vainly to subdue his cheerful visage. 'Never had anything so terrible happened at Turonia since it was a goldfield. Merlin, Greffham, and I are going to ride out to the spot to-morrow. Would you like to come?'

'With pleasure,' said Ernest; 'that is, I shall go as a matter of duty. But what is up?'

'Just this——' said Bright. 'But surely you must have heard it?'

'Not a word,' replied Ernest. 'Pray go on. I have suspected something wrong, but have not the faintest idea what it is.'

'Henderson and Carroll,' said Bright solemnly, 'two of the men in the force, the troopers that you saw start with the gold, were yesterday found *dead*—murdered, evidently—near the Running Creek. All the gold and bank notes have been taken, and the police have no more idea who the murderer is than you or I have. Have you, Merlin?' he asked of that gentleman, who now joined them.

'Are there any bushrangers or bad characters known to be in the neighbourhood?' asked Mr. Neuchamp. 'I have always thought it a perfect marvel that so little overt crime existed among this immense assemblage of men, with so many exciting causes. There must be *very few* criminals, or else they keep very quiet.'

'We know of scores of men of the very worst class and most desperate character,' replied Mr. Merlin; 'but, as you say, they have been kept very quiet. Still, it never does to relax caution, as, if a sufficiently "good thing," in their phraseology, turns up, they are always ready to run all risks for the spoil. You have pushed against men who have committed more than *one* or even two murders. I saw you talking to one the other day by the Chinaman's store in Stanley Street.'

'Good heaven!' said Ernest, much moved, 'you don't say so? And was that quiet, sober-looking man that I was chatting with—I remember him quite well now—a known criminal?'

'One of the worst we have,' rejoined the Inspector in a matter-of-fact tone. 'A cold-blooded, treacherous ruffian. He *dares* not drink on account of what he might let out; but we know where he has been and all about him this time. He was not near the spot.'

At this moment a telegram was put into the Inspector's hand, which he read carefully and showed to Ernest.

'Of course this is strictly confidential,' he said.

The telegram ran as follows:—

Notes traced, known to have been in the packet forwarded by escort. Arrest Jones.

'This gives a clue, of course, but,' said the official with diplomatic reserve, 'we may or may not follow it up. Possibly we may be thrown out; but eventually I venture to think Mr. Jones will be run into in the open.'

'Arrest Jones,' repeated Mr. Neuchamp. 'And have you been able to secure him?'

'I don't know whether the police have got hold of him yet,' said Mr. Merlin cautiously; 'but I daresay we shall be able to give an account of him by and by. If not, he will be the first man who has got clear off since this goldfield was discovered.'

'In the meantime you are going out to view the scene of the murder and the bodies of these poor fellows just as a matter of form and for your own satisfaction?'

'Precisely so,' assented Mr. Merlin; 'principally as a matter of form.'

'And Greffham is going with us just for company, like Bright, to make up the party, I suppose?' continued Ernest. 'It is very good-natured of him, for he told me yesterday that he had some important business to-day, and that he would not be about the town. But I have always found him most obliging.'

'So have I, most obliging, as you say. The fact is, he knows the spot exactly where these poor fellows must have been met.'

'But that Jones,' said Ernest eagerly, 'what a ruffian! what a cold-blooded villain he must have been! How I should like to fall across him. I could cheerfully go to see him hanged.'

'Perhaps you may have that gratification yet,' replied Mr. Merlin with a grim smile. 'More unlikely things have happened. Hallo! here comes Greffham.'

The gentleman referred to now sauntered up, accurately turned out in quite the best boots and breeches which Ernest had seen since he left England. His hunting scarf was adorned with the regulation Reynard brooch, and from throat to long-necked, heavy polished spur he was altogether *point-device*.

He looked a shade paler, probably from the effect of his yesterday's long ride, but his smile was as ready, his repartee as incisive, as ever, while his light-blue eye fell with its usual glance of cold scrutiny upon the advanced guard of the party.

'What a fellow you are, Merlin,' said he, 'starting at this unearthly hour. Why didn't you give a man a chance of a little sleep, who had, what you never get, a day's work yesterday?'

'My dear Greffham,' replied the Inspector with irresistible urbanity, 'I was certain that you and Bright would enjoy the fresh morning air above all things. I know he's a terribly early riser, and you can wake when it suits you; so I determined, under the circumstances, upon an early start.'

'All right,' quoth Bright; 'I don't care how early you get away. It can't be too early for me.'

'And besides, Greffham,' said Merlin, 'you know the short cut to Running Creek, which not every one can find. I propose

to stay the night at the Ten-Mile Inn, and to make for the scene of the murder next day.'

'Come on, then,' said Greffham harshly; 'what the devil are we standing prating for? If you are in such a cursed hurry why don't you get away instead of standing here burning daylight?'

'We were waiting for Markham,' said Merlin good-humouredly, 'but I daresay the old fellow will pull up. Come along, then. I'm awfully obliged to you for coming, Greffham; I am indeed!'

Mr. Neuchamp had before remarked the extreme readiness of most people upon the goldfield to accede to any wish expressed by Mr. Merlin, and he recurred to it for the edification of Mr. Greffham, citing it as an instance of the very remarkable courtesy of manner which, as he was never tired of noting, distinguished the inhabitants of the settlement of Turonia.

Greffham listened in silence to Ernest's philosophical utterances, and, lighting a cigar, rode steadily forward. Here Ernest was impressed with the fact that, as a party, they were unusually well armed, as also well mounted. The four troopers, one couple of whom rode in front as scouts, while another pair followed at easy distance, had each a Snider carbine. A 'navy' revolver hung at each man's belt. Their horses were uncommonly well bred and in really good condition. Merlin, of course, never by any chance stirred without his revolver; and he was on his favourite Arab hackney, Omar Pacha, an indomitable gray, of proverbial pace and endurance. Mr. Bright had two revolvers, beside a pocket Derringer, which latter had a trick of going off unexpectedly, and had once 'made it hot' for a friend and brother banker. Greffham was apparently unarmed, but he never permitted any one to know more than he wished even in the most trifling matters. He was an 'ace-of-clubs' man with the pistol, and, had duelling been fashionable at Turonia, he would no doubt have distinguished himself after much the same fashion as the hard-drinking 'blazers' of the Wild West a hundred years ago.

Before they had gone half a dozen miles they were overtaken by a squarely built man on a bay cob, who interchanged a hasty but hardly visible signal with Mr. Merlin, and fell into the rear. The newcomer was a clean-shaved, Saxon-looking person, not very unlike a snug tradesman. He made an ordinary remark or two to Greffham and then subsided into obscurity. *He* also was well armed, and bore himself in a quietly resolute manner that impressed Mr. Neuchamp much.

The day was hot, the road sandy, and, as it appeared to Ernest, more tiresome than bush roads of similar nature were apt to be. The conversation, which had been general and well sustained at first, fell off gradually, until each man rode silently on, fanning the flies from his face, and apparently becoming more irritable, hot, and uncomfortable as the day wore on.

The only exception to this result of the tedious wayfaring was Mr. Merlin. He apparently did not suffer in temper, spirits, or natural comfort from the exigencies of the journey. He kept up an even flow of conversation with Greffham and Bright, albeit the former chiefly answered in monosyllables, and the latter freely cursed the road, the day, the flies, and the unwarrantable and misplaced sympathy which had caused him to accompany the expedition.

But the day drags on, whether the stormy north refuses the traveller the sight of the sun, or the languid south bestows too much of that indispensable potentate. The welcome coolness and dim shades of eve had commenced when the wayside inn was reached, the last roof shelter which the dead had known, where they had quaffed their last draught and possibly told their last jest. On the bank of a creek at some few miles' distance they had determined to make their camp, preferring it for some reasons to the inn. And there they had found their last resting-place.

Ernest remembered noticing the care and completeness which marked the men's equipment, their muscular, well set-up figures, their easy seats as they rode their high-constitutioned, well-bred horses up the street on the morning of their departure. And now they lay prone and motionless among the thick withering grass; above them waved the melancholy, sighing casuarina, from the branches of which croaked the raven—far-scenting herald of doom, sable watcher by the dead. As he thought of the manly, pleasant faces he could recall so easily, but of yesterday, as it seemed, the strongest feelings of wrath and hatred were stirred within him, and he muttered an imprecation of swift vengeance upon the head of the cold-blooded assassin Jones, if that indeed were the name of a wretch unfit to cumber earth. The sad surroundings, the gloomy tone of Mr. Neuchamp's thoughts, did not lead him to decline the respectable meal to which he found himself bidden along with the gentlemen of the party.

Markham and the troopers occupied another apartment, in which they made themselves fairly comfortable. The horses were stabled, and, save for the inevitable death-scene of the morrow, the evening would have passed not uncheerfully. As it was, however, Mr. Merlin organised whist, and even encouraged a little quasi-gambling by proposing higher stakes than usual. The chief result of which was that Mr. Neuchamp, having the experienced Lionel Greffham for a partner, won more money than he had lost in many an unsuccessful night in Turonia. In vain did Bright and Merlin 'plunge' by way of recouping their losses. The luck of Mr. Greffham was altogether too good; and Merlin, about midnight, gave in, saying, 'You have the devil's luck, as usual, Greffham. I wonder how long it will stick to you.'

'Who knows?' answered he indifferently, ringing the bell

and ordering refreshment on a liberal scale. 'It has held on pretty well so far. It may turn, though, and then I think I could find a bullet for myself and a quiet couch.'

'Really now, my dear Greffham,' said Merlin, 'if I did not know you well, I should think you were threatening what no man of sense ever puts into practice. But I have seen luck stick to a man until the actual and inexorable finale. Then he and all the world had to acknowledge that they had been mistaken—more mistaken—most mistaken—in their previous calculations and investments. Don't you think we could manage another whisky before we turn in? I must have my smoke, anyhow.'

Ernest thought this, for him, unnecessary, and fell back upon soda-water; but Greffham, apparently, was disinclined for immediate retirement. He and Merlin sat up long, telling apparently never-ending, half-forgotten tales, and smoking furiously.

As Mr. Neuchamp, restless and feverish, chose to get up at dawn and pace the verandah, he saw Markham and Merlin holding colloquy in low tones, amid which he involuntarily caught the sound, on Markham's side, of the words 'all right.'

Shortly after the sharply disciplined troopers were astir at stable duty, and at sunrise the whole party were on their way to the fatal creek.

Bright and himself, Mr. Neuchamp thought, looked the freshest of the party, having had a few hours of sound sleep. Merlin's spirits were high, as on the previous day. Greffham looked if anything more indifferent, more calm and careless about all earthly concerns, his fellow-creatures in particular, than usual.

'It was by this track, round this very clump of pines, that you saw the men ride off, Greffham?' said Merlin. 'It is quite fortunate that you should be in a position to state your impression at a time which could not have been many hours before their deaths. How did they look? Do you think they had been drinking?'

'Can't say,' answered Greffham after a pause, as if trying to recall the exact circumstances. 'Carroll was a reserved, sulky-looking beggar, I always thought; one of those men that you could not tell liquor upon as long as he could keep his legs. Now I think of it, they did look rather stupid.'

'You are quite correct about Carroll, old fellow,' said Merlin airily; 'he *was* reserved and taciturn, a ridiculously unsuitable habit of mind for a subordinate. Odd thing that nothing has been heard of the gold or notes.'

'I suppose whoever took them,' said Greffham—'(try one of these cigars, little Seguadil sent me a box)—whoever took them had sense enough to conceal them for a while. The gold will turn up eventually.'

'But not the notes, you think?' persisted Merlin.

‘Not unless there is something uncommon about them—(this cigar won’t draw)—numbers taken and so on. If they are the ordinary well-thumbed paper promises current at diggings, they will be hardly identifiable.’

‘Very likely you are right. Deuced good cigar that. I wish the little beggar would send me some of that Amontillado of his; that and his Manzanares might really have come out of the King of Spain’s cellar, as he used to aver. But the road improves now, we may as well canter. Famous horse of yours, Greffham, nothing like him in Turonia.’

‘Why, Merlin,’ said Bright, ‘what a heavenly temper we are in this morning! Biliary secretions unusually right, I should say!’

‘Of course, Bright, of course; there’s no credit to a jolly, sanguine fellow like you for being in a good temper. Nature in your case has done so much that it would be the basest ingratitude if you did not second her efforts. Now spare fellows, like the elegant Lionel here and myself, with whom indigestion is more the rule than the exception, only require to feel free from torment to be in the seventh heaven. But here we are at the Running Creek. Look at the eagles already gathered.’

CHAPTER XXIII

A BODING gloom seemed to fall suddenly like a pall from the branches of the sighing, whispering, sad-voiced water-oaks, as they followed the winding track which led along the bank of the tiny streamlet to the small alluvial flat, upon which lay two—pah, what shall I say?—two figures covered with rugs, which may or may not have exhibited the human outline. 'They lay as dead men only lie.' A swarm of flies arose at the lifting of the coverings, and a terrible and intolerable odour diffused itself around. 'Great God!' cried Ernest, 'are these repulsive, fast-decaying masses of corruption all that are left of the high-hearted, gallant fellows I saw ride out of Turonia so short a while ago? Poor human nature, upon ever so slight summons, and must we come to this! Accursed be the greed of the yellow gold which brought our brother men to so hideous an ending.'

As these reflections flowed from the sympathetic heart of Ernest Neuchamp with a natural force that could not be controlled, he turned in time to notice that Mr. Merlin had directed the coverings to be removed from the corpses, and had instituted, in spite of their revolting condition after forty-eight hours' exposure to a burning sun, a thorough and searching examination.

One man, Carroll, lay on his side with face half upturned and arm outstretched, in the hand of which was grasped a revolver with a barrel discharged. An expression of defiance was still legibly imprinted upon the features—a bullet wound through the centre of the forehead had without doubt been the cause of death. The strong man had fallen prone, as if struck by lightning, and for ever, ever more the wondrous infinitely complicated machine was arrested. The soul had passed into the region of endless life, death, sleep, sorrow, joy!

'This man has been shot from the front, Greffham, shouldn't you say?' pronounced the clear, incisive tones of Mr. Merlin. 'He may or may not have been standing up to his assassin. If so, it was a species of duel, and the best shot and quickest had it. If you wouldn't care about standing there, now, by that

oak-tree, raise your arm, so ; by Jove, you would be just in the position that the man must have been in that dropped the poor sergeant.'

'Just the sort of thing that Greffham would have gone in for if he was hard up,' said Mr. Bright, chuckling. He was reckless as to the flavour of his jests, far from particular if only they were 'hot' enough.

'You are always thinking of that gold-buyer of yours that was shot, Bright,' said Greffham, wincing uneasily, though, under the concentrated gaze of three remarkably steady pairs of eyes,—Merlin's, Bright's, and Markham's. 'It's my belief that Halliday shot himself ; he was something like you, in always carrying half a bushel of revolvers, and, like your battery, it went off accidentally sometimes.'

'There's a boot mark in the sand underneath that oak-tree,' said Markham, with great suavity ; 'it's the very model of your track, Mr. Greffham, that you made there. Excuse me, sir.'

'I suppose other people wear boots as well as I,' he said. 'Bushmen and diggers are deuced rough, and all that, but they haven't come to going barefoot yet.'

'Nor wearing French boots with very narrow heels,' said Markham, as he measured the imprint of the said *bottine* with a small pocket rule. 'However, boots don't go for much, unless corroborated.' With this sapient speech Mr. Markham closed his remarks and apparently lost interest in the scene.

'Now this poor fellow,' interpolated Mr. Merlin, lifting up the trooper's face, and parting the thickly clustering brown curls, 'has been shot from *behind*. Here's the little hole through the back of his head, and the pistol must have been pretty close, as the powder has burned one side of it considerably. He has simply fallen over on his face, and there was an end of him. Here you can see where the valise containing the gold and notes was unstrapped from Sergeant Carroll's saddle. The saddles had been put back to back on the ground. One carbine is here still, and one is missing.'

'By Jove !' said Greffham, 'you know everything, Merlin. You're like the man in the *Arabian Nights* who described the camel that had passed the day before,—lame, blind of an eye, having lost two front teeth, and loaded half with rice and half with dates, and yet never saw him at all. You're a wonderful fellow ! You're so devilish sharp.'

'And you're a more wonderful fellow ; you're so devilish cool,' said Merlin. 'I *do* know a thing or two, and, upon my soul, I have need—*par exemple*, old fellow—it was devilish good-natured of you to come out all the way with us, but it has just occurred to me that you seem to have seen these poor fellows so *very* lately, just before they were rubbed out, that, quite as a matter of form, I must trouble you to explain your proceedings on that day to the authorities. Lionel Greffham !' continued he, in a voice which, raised and vibrating, was so utterly

changed that Ernest Neuchamp did not know it as that of this smiling satirist with his society talk and ready rapier of repartee, 'I arrest you on suspicion of murder and robbery.'

Perhaps the least astonished and agitated individual of the company was the accused himself. He swung round on one heel as Merlin laid a sinewy grasp upon his shoulder, and, drawing a small foreign-looking revolver from his breast, aimed fair at the heart of his quondam companion. At the same moment he was covered by the weapons of Markham, the troopers, and of Mr. Bright, who held straight for his former acquaintance with unmistakable aim and determination.

'It's no use, Mr. Greffham,' said Markham, 'I made your popgun safe at the inn last night. It would never have done to leave you the chance of giving us "Squirt Street." It won't pop if you pull the trigger for a week. Say you could drop Mr. Merlin, why we can "twice" you over and over.'

Mr. Merlin's clear gray eyes glittered with unwonted excitement. He also held a revolver in his right hand. 'My dear fellow,' he said, 'all excitement is bad form. You must be aware that you are only arrested on suspicion. Nothing may turn up to implicate you any more than Bright there, but in all these cases a man in my position has a duty to perform, and you know well I should do mine if you were my own brother, or the best friend I had in the world.'

By this time Greffham had recovered his usual composure. 'I don't doubt *that* for one moment, Merlin,' he said, with sardonic emphasis. 'I think you have such a talent in that line that you would rather enjoy "running in" your own father. However, business is business. You've thrown down your card, and as you seem to hold all the trumps at present, you must have the odd trick.'

'Precisely, precisely,' assented Mr. Merlin; 'I always thought you a devilish sensible fellow. So now we must make a start for home. I am afraid that I must—just as a matter of form, you know—Markham.'

That wary official moved forward, and noticing, without seeing, as it were, that his superior officer still held his revolver ready for immediate use, produced a pair of handcuffs, and with the ease and quickness of long experience slipped them over the wrists of him who was doomed never to sleep unfettered more.

The party, now become a procession, moved quietly homeward to Turonia. They halted at the inn, the landlord of which was considerably surprised at seeing the great Mr. Greffham's hands closed before him, while a trooper led his horse by a rein. Up to this period he had not the smallest suspicion that the lavish swell, who, like all men who affected wholesale piracy, was 'quite the gentleman' in the matter of free spending of money, could be possibly mixed up with a cold-blooded murder and an

extensive robbery. But now his intellect being permitted freedom, he remembered that Mr. Greffham had called at his inn at no long time after the troopers, one of whom he knew well, and furthermore that he remembered hearing a shot at a great distance. It might have been a revolver. He could not say. It was firearms of some sort. Might have been two shots. Saw nothing.

Ernest observed that Markham noted down in a large pocket-book the exact minute and hour of the faint report of firearms to which the innkeeper testified, the exact time at which the troopers were last seen alive by him, and the time of the arrival of Greffham; and those minor matters being definitely settled, Mr. Merlin conducting the interrogation in a very different voice from his society one, the subdued, if not noticeably saddened procession took the road for Turonia. It was late when they reached that somewhat peculiar settlement, but the streets were profusely lighted, busy, and more thronged than at noonday. When the modern inland Australian substitute for 'a plump of spears beneath a pennon gay' rode straight for the camp, the foremost trooper leading the horse of a manacled prisoner, whom many keen eyes at once recognised as Lionel Greffham, a low but savage murmur came from the dense and excited crowd. Whatever interest or enthusiasm might have been evoked in Mr. Neuchamp's breast by the wonders and novelties of the great goldfield and its heterogeneous, picturesque population, had now collapsed. A feeling of doubt and horror succeeded. A tinge of blood, a brooding death-shadow, was over the splendour and the glamour of the enormous treasure-pile which now in ceaseless, countless profusion seemed daily won from the reluctant earth. He heard to his great satisfaction that Mr. Banks and his party had arrived; that Levison's manager, a man of boundless experience in stock, more particularly cattle, was already hard at work at the muster, and that every day an increasing number of the female cattle destined for Rainbar was drafted and delivered to the 'tailing mob' in Mr. Banks's charge.

Satisfying himself by inspection that the very ordinary routine work of mustering a herd, when the mere numbers and sex were alone concerned, and where no battles had to be fought over individuals of disputed age, size, or quality, could be very safely delegated to subordinates, Ernest rode over to Branksome Hall for a farewell visit.

There he found himself an object of interest and friendly welcome, somewhat heightened by his late adventurous journey in company with Mr. Merlin. The young ladies were deeply shocked at the terrible finale to their acquaintance, slight as it had ever been, with the unhappy man who was now a prisoner and presumably a felon, where once he had shone a star of the first magnitude. Mr. Branksome was sufficiently a man of the world to have always distrusted the handsome and unscrupulous

adventurer. Beyond a formal call he had never been encouraged to see much of the interior of the Hall.

'Terrible affair this, Neuchamp,' said the host, as the whole party sat in the drawing-room before that evening summons had sounded which few are sufficiently philosophical or sympathetic to decline. 'I never had a high opinion of Greffham—always distrusted the man, but as to his murdering a couple of poor devils of troopers for the sake of a couple of thousand ounces of gold, why, I should as soon have expected him to have dropped strychnine into one's soup-plate at the Occidental at lunch.'

'Never fancied him,' said the Colonel; 'deuced well-dressed, well-set-up fellow; been in a cavalry regiment. But he had a cold-blooded, hard way of looking at one—bad eye too, cruel, devilish cruel—that man has taken life before, I swear—know the expression well, killing is not the fashion much in this country, too young yet—life too valuable—you don't know the signs of it.'

'I can hardly bear to speak of it,' said the eldest Miss Branksome. 'To think that *any one* of education and gentleman-like habit, for he *was* a gentleman as far as manner, appearance, every outward observance can make one, should have descended so low, gone down into the very pit of murder and theft, for what? What could have driven him to the edge of such a precipice? Surely there must be demons and fiends who have power over men's souls.'

'Extravagance, gambling, the habit of spending money without working for it,' said her father. 'Debt in one shape or other is one of the demons allotted to torment mortality in this period of the world's history. The demoniac of the age is the man who has bills or liabilities coming due without the means to meet them. He may appear ordinarily clothed and in his right mind, but, after some torturing hour, it may be related of him, as of this unhappy wretch, the evil "spirit tare him," and he "wallowed foaming."'

'It seems a wonderful thing that he didn't apply to some of his friends, doesn't it?' queried Mr. Neuchamp. 'He seemed to have plenty of them. Even if he had not been completely put right they could surely have given him enough to secure breathing time; but murder, robbery, pah! it is purely incredible to me, predicated of a man that we have all met more or less in habits of intimacy.'

'Nothing so wonderful about that,' said the Colonel; 'deuced cool, clever adventurer, you know, without one morsel of feeling in favour of what some people call principle, humanity, or honesty. Seen the style before. Big loot of any kind is the thing to bring out such a man in real form. Known fellows in Indian service too, by gad, who would kill a prisoner in cold blood or burn half a village for the sake of a few diamonds or a hoard of gold mohurs.'

'It's positively awful, dreadful, miserable,' said the youngest Miss Branksome. 'I shall dream of nothing else for a month, I know. Papa, isn't that the dinner bell? Now there's a forfeit if anybody says a word about gold or murder or anything belonging to Turonia again this evening. We shall be quite demoralised with all this Fouché business. There's Mr. Bright begins to look as if he was going to act upon "information received" every time I see him.'

The inmates of that pleasant home finished the evening without overt allusion to the awful tragedy which had overshadowed their neighbourhood, and brought dishonour and death, rare visitors ere this, even to the reckless, toiling, fargathered goldfields community. But in every heart, from time to time, in the pause of the conversation, in the silence of the night hour, arose the dimly-outlined picture of the lonely flat where the sighing oaks whispered and faintly wailed over two motionless figures, dread and silent, among the thick, dry, waving grass. On the reverse shadow-tracery a well-known figure, with an evil light in the cold blue eyes, a hellish sneer on the short, curved lip, was pacing the gloomy flags of a felon's cell!

Though Mr. Neuchamp on the morrow parted with great regret from his kind friends of Branksome Hall, he could not conceal from himself that Turonia, under the circumstances, would be the last place in which he should choose to linger. A shadow of gloom, a savour of blood, was with the whole place and surroundings in his eyes, and though the streets still trembled as before under the tread of an army of Britain's best workers, and though at night there was store of pleasant society and excitement, all interest in the gold city had marvellously abated. Mr. Neuchamp was impatient until his moving contingent should be ready for the road, and to that end betook himself with grateful energy to the distraction of mustering the herd.

With the efficient aid of Mr. Cottonbush, the much-experienced overseer deputed by Mr. Levison to carry out this particular duty, the whole herd was mustered and drafted with an economy of time and completeness of result very astonishing to Ernest.

His part was confined to giving Mr. Cottonbush a receipt for nineteen hundred and seventy head of female cattle of all sorts, sizes, and ages, and having divided the said cows and heifers into two droves, an immediate departure was made for Rainbar. Mr. Banks was permitted to examine and explore the wonders of Turonia for the space of one day only; and after bidding farewell to his friends at the camp and at Branksome Hall, Mr. Neuchamp rejoined his party, manfully performing his share of road work until, after many a weary week's travelling and monotonous daily drudgery, they struck the river within a day's ride of Rainbar.

When Mr. Neuchamp once more alighted at the door of his

cottage he felt the pleasurable glow which is rarely absent from the mind of any healthily constituted man returning after absence to his home.

'Home, sweet home!' hummed Mr. Neuchamp. 'I don't know whether the time-honoured words strictly apply to Rainbar, but I'm glad to see the old place again. The grass looks none too fresh, though, as if they had had little or no rain. It would have been inspiring to have seen a little green after all the terrible dry weather we have had. I suppose these two thousand new cattle will be able to keep alive. As for paying for them, if I had not Levison's advice and guarantee to depend upon, I should utterly despair of it.'

He had finished his evening meal when Mr. Jack Windsor was announced, that gentleman having been all day 'out back,' and having but just returned. He was unaffectedly glad to see Ernest, and gave a favourable account of the stock and station matters generally.

'I don't say as we've had much of a break-up of the dry time,' he said, 'but the rains come very stiddy and soaking every now and then. Besides, there's been one or two fine thunderstorms out back, where I've been to-day. The feed's a deal better than any I see in here. We're a-getting on towards the end of the autumn now, and we might have a regular wet season, that will just crown us. I suppose the store cattle is all right.'

'In very fair strength and spirits, Jack. Mr. Banks thought that they would do splendidly here before spring, if there was any rain at all.'

'If it wasn't for these confounded cookies,' said Mr. Windsor, 'that big flat would be a first-rate place to break 'em into, while they'll have to be at the water every day. But it's no use thinking of it. I've had a deal of bother with 'em as it is; them boys are always cutting about the run on horseback, looking for a calf, or a colt, or something. I'd give a tenner out of my own pocket they was all out of that and back at Bowning or some other stringy-bark hole as is fit for 'em.'

Three days had elapsed since this conversation, when the two large droves of patient, slow-moving cattle arrived at Rainbar. Mr. Windsor was much impressed by their general appearance, and asserted confidently that such a lot of cows and heifers had never before been seen on the river.

'They're regular first-class bred 'uns, that's what they are,' he asserted; 'that's the best of going in with a man like Levison. He's always got the sugar, consequence he always gets the worth of his money, and doesn't get put off with half-and-half goods. He knows a thing or two, does Levison. Anyhow he's a stunning mate to go shares with.'

After a short time spent in making necessary arrangements for the new arrivals, Mr. Neuchamp commenced to review his position. Much seriousness of visage resulted from the financial examination.

In the first place no cattle had been sold in his absence. Nor were there now any in sufficiently high condition to be turned into cash with the same facility as of old. A considerable hole had been made in the overdraft which Messrs. Oldstile and Crampton had grudgingly permitted him. He had signed bills at twelve months' date for the late purchase of cattle; and accommodating as Mr. Levison might be, the acceptances would have to be met or provided for at maturity. Prospectively profitable as the transaction was, Mr. Neuchamp commenced to make acquaintances with the ominous suggestion, 'Bankruptcy,' and to wonder whether he should *really*, in spite of all his plans, prudence, and philanthropy, be compelled, even as others were whom he had contemptuously pitied in old times, to surrender unconditionally.

Of this dread and final catastrophe Mr. Neuchamp had a lively horror which no sophistry could abate. He was not one to fall back upon the many excuses and palliations which the fluctuating markets, the uncertain season, afforded. No, no; the stoppage of payment meant Ruin and Disgrace. It would sound the knell of hope, would proclaim dishonour inevitable, irrevocable, as well as the total failure of all the plans and projects which his heart held dearest. His perusal of the newspapers, which had accumulated to a goodly pile in his absence, brought no hint of indulgence. The markets were low; the season had not yet improved so as to place the stock out of danger. If all debts incurred were to be met, there was little expectation of being able to liquidate them by the aid of the stock then depasturing upon Rainbar.

More than this, he found among his correspondence an epistle from Messrs. Oldstile and Crampton, written in the very old-fashioned manner affected by that sound but non-progressive firm. It informed their very worthy and most esteemed constituent, Mr. E. Neuchamp, that the five hundred pounds last paid to his credit was exhausted, and that unless, of course, his account was supported by remittance, they could under *no circumstances* continue to honour his orders.

A letter from Paul Frankston, though kind and hearty in tone, was not reassuring. He said that the times were exceedingly bad,—so bad that even he, Paul, had had work to meet his engagements, and had at no time for many years past been so sorely pressed. He noticed that every day fresh station properties were being brought into the market, and hoped that an utter crash and collapse of stock and stations was not about to take place, as in 1842-43. The only reason for believing that a favourable change would take place in the stock-market was that the yield of gold appeared to be increasing, and that though temporary inconvenience had taken place, he, Paul, fully believed that in the course of a year or two there would be a very different state of matters. He therefore advised Ernest to be hopeful, and, while keeping down expenses to the narrowest

limit, to hold on to his station with his eyelids, so to speak. Those who had done so at any former period of the country's history were now wealthy men. He believed yet that Ernest, if he steadily adhered to his proper work and—pardon him—abstained from speculative experiments, would eventually do well. He hoped that he had got his newly-purchased store cattle safely on the run. He had the greatest confidence in Levison's unerring judgment in such matters. He might be unduly prejudiced in his favour, but he had never known him to be wrong. If everything went to the bad, no doubt this purchase would make matters no worse. If otherwise, they were the nucleus of a future, and not a small one either. His last advice was to keep the ordinary station work in the best possible trim, and not to spend one shilling in other than absolute necessities. Antonia was very well, but did nothing but read all day. He had suggested her going in for a degree at the university, but she had not cared for the suggestion. When rain came perhaps Ernest might manage another run down the country.

Mr. Neuchamp steadily devoted himself to a full consideration of the matters placed before him in this letter—considerate and delicate in feeling, as indeed had been every word and line of advice received by him from Paul Frankston from the very beginning of their acquaintance. No one could have fancied that the whole of the obligation had been upon his, Ernest's, side, from the day when he first exploded Hartley Selmore's politico-economical arrangement for subsidising holders of station properties with the capital of ingenuous newly-arrived colonists. For how much generous hospitality, shrewd counsel, often implied rather than proffered, substantial assistance and unswerving friendship, was he not his debtor? And Antonia? The more he saw of girls generally,—and he did not rate those Australian young ladies, who had equal advantages of training, society, and culture, at a jot below their English contemporaries,—the more deep became his conviction of her unusual range of thought, depth of feeling, and purity of mind. As the dry, cool wind of the Australian autumn wailed and sighed over the wide gray plains, and around the useful but unromantic edifices which went to make up the homestead at Rainbar, Ernest began to feel a somewhat intensified, intolerable sensation of intellectual loneliness. For the hundredth, five hundredth, time he wished that it would rain. Why did it not rain? Was the land accursed, like Egypt in the olden Pharaoh days? Rain would do so much. Put an end to his anxieties about the stock. Improve the condition and lessen the expense of the new cattle. Perhaps, nay, certainly, send up the price of stock generally. Liberalise the ideas of Messrs. Oldstyle and Crampton. Render a trip to town possible; and oh, the sight once more of the verandah at Morahmee! the savour of the fresh brine-laden air! the sight of the foam-fringed billows of the unbounded sea!

the—— But the further contemplation of impossible delights, rendered such by his now comparatively lengthened inland exile, was sternly repressed by the philosophic mind of Mr. Neuchamp. And rain, in England at least, had always seemed such a little thing—to be had for nothing; to be guarded against by the timid, complained about by the superficial, anathematised by the reckless, constant in and out of season—a nuisance, a drug, a daily dread. Why then, in the name of all the mighty, merciful powers, did it not rain? It was clearly no use fretting about the absence of the gladdening, fertilising phenomenon in a dry and thirsty land, or philosophising about the relation of monsoons to icebergs, any unusual protraction or prominence in which natural facts and forces of the calm unswerving giantess, Nature, might alter climates and prices, from Lake Alexandrina to the Snowy River, from Carpentaria to the county of Cumberland. The matter on hand was the plain and prosaic adjustment of his ‘duty a dead sure thing,’ and admitting of but little variation from the point.

Therefore for the present, and as day after day arose bright and cool, with breezy morn and pure fresh bracing atmosphere, unhappily suggestive of continuous *dry* weather, Mr. Neuchamp, discarding theories, reveries, and projects, sternly addressed himself to work. From earliest dawn to a late hour the whole of the little community was astir. It had been with a feeling of deep satisfaction that Ernest had watched, for the first time, the great droves of ‘new cattle’ spread, unchecked, over the Rainbar plain, and take their first meal of the scanty but highly nutritive salsolaceous herbage. Bred in a ‘sour grass’ country, far inferior for fattening purposes, though having merits of its own, the docile, highly-bred herd might be expected, under ordinary conditions, to grow and develop in the most unprecedented manner. There is a peculiar pleasure, felt by all station proprietors, in the examination of the droves or flocks of store stock placed for the first time upon their new pastures. Generally purchased at a comparatively low price, and passing from inferior to superior fattening country, if the season be favourable a cheering alteration takes place. It is pleasant for the sheep-owner to perceive his ‘large-framed healthy wethers’ (as per advertisement) laying on condition day by day, passing through all the stages of comparative obesity which enables him to ‘top the market’ with them as fat sheep, having previously denuded them of a fleece which, perhaps, fully pays the cost of the original purchase.

But the gratification known to the purchaser of ‘store’ or ‘lean’ cattle, either for fattening or for increase, is of a higher and more intense, because of a more complex, nature, as becomes the more individualised character of the stock.

Day by day, if but the pasture be sufficient, the range wide, the weather favourable, the season propitious, the stockmen practised and efficient—if, I repeat, all these conditions be

fulfilled, then indeed does the happy pastoralist taste all the joys of his successful and pleasant position. Day by day, as he rides forth in the fresh morn, the warm kind eve, he notes the stranger kine more habitually wander out to the springing pasture and back to the creek, marsh, river, which is their water privilege. He sees the steers grow glossy of hide, thicker, lengthier, ripen into marketable bullocks. He sees the tiny she yearlings grow into sonsy heifers; the angular cows into imposing, deep-brisketed, flat-backed matrons, ever and anon with younglets, 'to the manor born,' and likely in time to pay double the original cost of the parent, with a high percentage for personal profit. Lastly, the first draft of bullocks picked from these, if a mixed herd, pays for the whole lot—steers, bullocks, cows, and calves—leaving the spirited purchaser with a tolerably large and increasing herd, all profit.

Many of these pleasurable emotions would have found lodging in the breast of Mr. Neuchamp had circumstances, that is the season, been favourable. But nothing was favourable. The skies were like brass—even as the money market—with no rent or fissure through which mercy or change could by any means be perceived. The scanty pasture provoked the instinct-guided cattle to wander far and fast. In pursuit Ernest was fain to hurry, personally or vicariously, till every horse on the establishment, Osmund included, had as much as he could do to carry his rider for a day's slow journey. Indeed the said rider was occasionally to be descried carrying his saddle home upon his own proper back, having left his weak and weary steed out on the plain.

The original herd, every beast of which had been bred and reared at Rainbar, was not altogether badly off. Acquainted with every nook and corner of the run, they 'went back' almost incredible distances for grass, only returning to the bare vicinity of the water when desperate with thirst. It is wonderful what privation in that respect the half-wild herds of cattle and horses will undergo in a dry country in a dry season, without seriously imperilling their health and strength. If they can only procure a debauch upon water from time to time, they stave off famine in a manner quite impossible to the shorthorns and unadventurous beeves of more rainy climes, more succulent pastures.

As to the members of the co-operative settlement—the cockatoos, as Jack Windsor incorrectly called them—they were not, in that time of trial, an element of help or consolation. Their cattle had increased even suspiciously fast. The untoward season had brought out the narrow greed and cunning of their natures into unpleasant prominence.

Under the impression that Ernest would most probably be ruined and be compelled shortly to sell Rainbar, they arrived at the conclusion that there was nothing to be gained by concession, and so gradually threw off any semblance of deference. They rigidly enforced the exclusion of the Rainbar cattle from their

very extensive pre-emptive grass rights, and they hunted with their dogs new cattle and old indifferently, not particularly caring, it would seem, whether they were or were not lost.

Ernest was first grieved, then indignant, at this gross ingratitude. Under the influence of these feelings he expostulated with them warmly, alleging his right, as having advanced a portion of the purchase-money for their holdings, to some consideration, if the general sympathy and kindness which he had accorded to them was to go for nothing.

Abraham Freeman replied that they did not see that they had anything to thank him for, particularly that they had left good homes to come to this confounded dry sand-heap of a country. That they intended to stick up for their pre-emptives, as the cattle were all their dependence now, and that if he wanted to make terms with them, they would be satisfied with that portion of the run—with the river frontage, of course—which lay to the westward of their settlement. If he just gave them the use of that bit of country—it was only five or six miles in length, and didn't go far back—then they would bind themselves *not to take up any more of his run*.

This last implied threat completed the obliteration of the last shred of Mr. Neuchamp's patience. These heartless, unprincipled wretches, whom he had raised from a position of indifferently paid toil, akin to daily labour, to that of thriving graziers, basely forgetful of his exceptional benevolence, were actually trading upon their power of annoyance and injurious occupation of his run! Very bitter were Mr. Neuchamp's reflections when this evil growth of human nature was thus indisputably proved. Had it not been so bad a season he might have overlooked it. But now, when fate and the very skies were at war with him, this instance of ingratitude overpowered all philosophic calmness.

He immediately convened a meeting of the heads of families of the house of Freeman, and informed them, in sufficiently decided tones, that he found himself to have been mistaken in his estimate of their principles and characters; that he had sought to benefit them chiefly; had already assisted them to a partial independence, and that he had looked for some decent recognition of his efforts for their sole advantage. They had chosen to deceive and to threaten. He was resolved now to confine them strictly to their land, to require repayment of the money which he had lent, and to hold no terms of any kind whatever with them.

Messrs. Freeman Brothers were somewhat astonished by Ernest's capacity for righteous indignation. They had not expected anything of the sort. They had looked for unlimited toleration. They now began to consider that a declaration of war might possibly result injuriously to their own interests, and they possibly had the grace to remember that, up to this stage of the affair, Mr. Neuchamp had been considerate, or, in

their phraseology, 'soft,' to an extent altogether unprecedented in their experience of the pastoral tenants of the Crown. They would have no more loading, an easy way of providing themselves with the very moderate amount of cash necessary for their ordinary expenditure.

Certainly they did not need any large outlay. There are few lands under the sun, the Coral Islands of that charmed main the Great South Sea excepted, where there is such a possibility of tranquil, joyous progress along life's pathway, without the use of the circulating medium, as in the settlements of the older colonies of Australia.

For instance, the Freemans had, as it were for nothing, house room, fuel, water, and light. Their garden supplied them with an annual crop of pumpkins, melons, and other esculents, which gave them vegetable food for the greater part of the year. Far larger crops might have been produced by a comparatively trifling increase of labour or thought. They had milk, butter, and meat from their herd, in ordinary years, in profusion. The few necessities which they were absolutely reduced to import or purchase were clothes, of which, owing to the mildness of the climate, they needed but few; tea and sugar, salt and flour, with a trifling stock of household utensils and furniture. With respect to the tea and sugar, a large reduction might have been made in this section had it been the fashion, as it was the exceptional practice, of isolated settlers to substitute milk for the former, as an ordinary adjunct to the three meals of the day.

But tea in Australia, grateful alike in the burning heat of summer and in the bitter frosts and sleet of winter, portable, innocuous, nutritive, and slightly stimulating, is the beer of the common people; and we know from experience that the attempt 'to rob a poor man of his beer' has always hitherto proved unpopular and unsuccessful.

We must therefore assume that a half-chest of tea and a couple of bags of medium brown sugar must be added to the expenditure of the small farmer, or 'free selector,' as he is now universally called.

Australia is not a good game country. Still the different varieties of the kangaroo are palatable and nutritious, more resembling the flesh of the hare and rabbit, with a flavour of veal, than beef or mutton. With the aid of a brace of rough greyhounds—the kangaroo-dog of the colonists—these are easily procured in any quantity. The skins are worth a shilling each, and are useful as mats or for coverings. The rivers and creeks, particularly the larger watercourses, are generally filled with fresh-water codfish and several other divisions of the perch family. These are considered to afford valuable supplementary aid to the perhaps scanty supply of butchers' meat, on many a far-out farm in summer time.

With regard to the condition of the rather exclusive settle-

ment formed and owned by the Freeman family, they had each made shift to bring from a couple to half a dozen brood mares, perhaps originally purchased for from half-a-crown to half-a-sovereign each, out of the Bowning pound. These hardy, though not perhaps well-bred, animals had increased wonderfully since their arrival, and were now, of themselves, quite a small herd. The younger members of the Freeman families could of course ride like Comanches, and no inconsiderable portion of their time was spent in running in these swift and half-wild mustangs, breaking them, losing them, finding them; and in all these operations and employment galloping around and across the Rainbar run, to the wrath and constant annoyance of Jack Windsor and Charley Banks.

Some effort was made, in a half-sullen, half-apologetic way, by Abraham Freeman to remove the ban under which the whole settlement lay. But Ernest was fixed and implacable in righteous disapproval. He gave strict orders that no stock of the offending co-operatives was to be permitted to graze upon the Rainbar run; that the boys were to be told that they would be summoned for trespass if they were found riding over the run or driving stock off without notice. War was declared in form. The strayed cattle belonging to the smaller graziers were placed in the Rainbar yard from time to time, and kept there till taken away by their owners. They were not permitted to purchase any articles from the station store. And, in fine, a blockade cordon was morally drawn round that nucleus of agricultural co-operative progress which had called forth so many sanguine prophecies. Mr. Neuchamp was sternly immutable and indignant of attitude. Slow to arouse and difficult to persuade of intentional wrongdoing, he was *very* loath to retreat from any gage of battle thus produced.

Both Charley Banks and Jack Windsor regarded this latter step with disapprobation. It had been ridiculously credulous and weak, according to their mode of thought, to invite the Freemans to settle on Rainbar. It was lamentably imprudent to quarrel openly with them now they *were* settled.

The second brother assented without much hostile observation, regretting that they had fallen out for nothing, as he expressed it; and Mr. Joe Freeman smiled in a scarcely reassuring manner, as Charley Banks thought, and said if it came to a pounding match, the cove would find that they could do him a deuced sight more hurt than he could do them.

Mr. Windsor, who had seen more of the ways of small freeholders, and understood their modes of feeling and action better than did Charley Banks, much less Mr. Neuchamp, did not regard this open declaration of hostilities as likely to add to their comfort, profit, or advantage.

‘Mr. Neuchamp did a soft thing in bringing these chaps here, and now he’s acting far from wise in letting ’em know what he thinks of ’em. He ought to have kept in with ’em and

watched 'em, and if they went "on the cross" about the stock, he'd have had 'em safe and sound in Drewarrina Gaol some fine day.'

This was Jack's idea of justifiable free-selectoricide. It might occasionally miss fire, but in the long run it was very likely to bag the 'picker-up of unconsidered trifles' in the shape of unbranded stock.

'Those chaps can do the boss a deuced sight more damage than he can do them if they're drove to it,' continued Mr. Windsor. 'They watch him when he isn't thinkin' of them, and if our cattle ain't on their land, they can *make 'em* trespass any night they please. I know the likes of them well, and I'd rather take 'em quiet than bustle 'em any day.'

'You're not far wrong, Jack,' assented Mr. Banks. 'We must keep these new cattle close, or they'll have a lot ready for Drewarrina pound some fine morning, as sure as my name is Charley Banks.'

By careful watching, by riding early and riding late, this highly probable outcome of the feud between Mr. Neuchamp and his late *protégés* was for a time avoided. But

There never yet was human power
Which could evade, if unforgiven,
The patient search and vigil long
Of him who treasures up a wrong.

It is questionable whether Byron had the operation of the Lands Occupation Act for the colony of New South Wales in view when he penned these lines, but they apply as closely to the general consequences of that great statute as if his lordship had intended to settle the affairs of Australia, after leading to victory the anti-Turkish party of the day.

The brothers Freeman, by a peculiar mental process, had managed to ignore the very substantial aid in cash and employment, the former still unrepaid, furnished by Mr. Neuchamp. By fixing all their attention upon his latter line of conduct, they became convinced that in denying their cattle access to every portion of the Rainbar run he had inflicted upon them a great wrong. This they determined to avenge if not to redress; and one fine morning an ill-written note, brought by a brown-faced urchin of ten years old about breakfast time, informed Mr. Neuchamp that William and Joseph Freeman had discovered three hundred and forty-seven of his cattle trespassing upon their land, which cattle were now in their custody, and which they proposed driving to Drewarrina pound (about seventy miles off) if not forthwith released with damages and expenses paid.

'What in the name of all that's rascally can we do?' inquired Ernest of Charley Banks, as he tossed the note over to him across the breakfast table. 'I feel inclined to go down and take the cattle by force. The dishonest, scheming vagabonds!'

'That's what I should like to do,' said Banks, 'and I think Jack and I could hammer that Bill Freeman and his brother, but I'm afraid it won't do. If we rescue the cattle we can be summoned and fined; besides taking us all the way to that rascally hole of a township.'

'Then let them keep them, and drive them over to the pound. The damage can't be much.'

'And let them hunt them over, and yard them half the time?' demanded Mr. Banks. 'No, that wouldn't do either. The cattle wouldn't recover it for the whole season. You'll have to buy him off. So much a head. It's the shortest way through it.'

Mr. Neuchamp groaned. This way was degrading. A pecuniary loss, for which he did not care so much as he ought to have done, for Ernest was one of those people who rarely regard a cheque or order as the bag of golden sovereigns that anything over a ten-pound note really is. Also, a loss of dignity, which he felt keenly, that he should be placed in the dilemma of having to pay to release his own cattle from his own tenants, so to speak, or to see them injured and lowered in value by those base burghers of the corporation he had himself led into the land of promise!

'There is nothing else to be done,' said Charley. 'They have the best of us now; we must pay.'

'I don't believe the cattle were on their land at all,' pleaded the founder of the society.

'That's nothing,' opposed Mr. Banks, 'they'll swear they *found 'em there*, and bring three or four witnesses to prove it; you'd better give me a cheque for thirty pounds, and let me square it with them. I think we shall get out for that.'

Mr. Neuchamp much regretted sacrificing any portion of his latest and probably concluding advance from Messrs. Oldstile and Crampton in such an unsatisfactory manner, but was compelled to employ that only universal solvent, a cash payment. Mr. Banks departed with the magic missive. I have no authentic record of what actually passed between him and Bill Freeman, but he returned with the cattle. It was also noticed that no peculiar exacerbation occurred between the litigants after this interview.

Another month wore away in the performance of the ordinary work, and the endurance of rather more than the ordinary crosses and losses consequent upon the still protracted drought.

No rain. And again, no rain. Nothing grew. All nature became daily more wan, pale, leafless. The crop of expenses, inevitable and regular, in contradistinction to the produce of the season, grew and matured, until once more the limit of advance agreed to by Messrs. Oldstile and Crampton was definitely reached. Of this ultimate fact Mr. Neuchamp was unpleasantly reminded by the return, unpaid, of his last half-

dozen orders, arriving by the mail preceding that which furnished an exceedingly formal letter, advising the unpleasant step which his agents, to their extreme regret, had been compelled to take.

Ernest felt this hitherto unknown annoyance to be the precursor of a financial earthquake, in which possibly his present possessions and future hopes might be engulfed.

He tried to consider his position with the calmness proper to so grave a conjuncture. But he had much difficulty in preserving the requisite freedom from disturbance. Ever and anon would come, as with a lightning flash, the vision of all his cherished projects disappearing down the dark chasm of insolvency and ruin.

His stud of Australian Arabs, now so promising, would be sold for the price of bush mustangs. His store cattle, nearly broken to the run, would be as valueless as if, in spite of their high breeding, they had been composed in great part of the 'scrub-danglers,' one of whom had so unwarrantably assaulted him on his arrival at Rainbar. His pet engineering scheme, unfinished and derided, would be henceforth ticketed among the denizens of the locality as Neuchamp's Folly. Ernest had not more than the ordinary share of self-love, through which nature makes provision for the preservation of the individual, but he commenced to feel by anticipation the pangs which are inseparable from pronounced failure in any soever enterprise or profession. He heard Mr. Jermyn Croker's unqualified verdict that 'he had always been a philanthropic lunatic, from whom nothing else could have been expected; the only wonder being that any one had been found fool enough to trust him, and thereby enable him to make so respectable a smash of it.' Others doubtless would follow in the same suit. Even the good-natured Parklands and the charitable Aymer Brandon, who gave, as they required indeed, much frank social absolution, could scarcely refrain from unreserved condemnation of his 'improvement' theory. As to the 'grateful tenantry' idea, represented by Freeman Brothers, with their grass-rights, their hostility, and their herds and their flocks—for they had lately purchased a thousand debilitated travelling sheep at about sixpence per head—it would not bear thinking of. He was now in full endurance of the reactionary stage of despondency occasionally bestowed as a counterpoise to the ordinarily high average of tone with which the sanguine man is blessed or cursed, as the case may be. As Mr. Neuchamp reviewed his generous and lofty aims, his far-reaching plans and projects dependent upon so kindly a future for success, he inclined to the latter reading. They appeared to him in this his dark hour as the fantasies of an opium-eater or the dream-palaces of a slumbering child.

Mr. Neuchamp, after a day spent in sad consideration, unfortunately permitted himself to pursue the unending evil of regret during the night. His heightened imagination multiplied

disaster and enlarged evil to such a degree that he was more than once tempted to spring from his thorny couch and take to the broad starlit plain for the relief of exercise.

‘So sore was the delirious goad,
I took my steed and forth I rode,’

says the remorseful Marmion; and but that in the present state of the fodder market no horses had been stabled at Rainbar for many a day, our latter-day Crusader might have followed out the idea literally. As it was he but arose at earliest dawn and mechanically took the garden path, trusting to find some excuse for an hour or two of hard manual labour which might guide or exorcise the evil spirits that were rending his very soul.

He had been putting out all his strength for an hour or more, and was in much the same bodily state and condition as if he had taken a ten-mile spin with a greatcoat on, after the prescription of Mr. Geoffry Delamayn, when he observed a solitary horseman wending his way along the ‘up-river’ road, which was distinguishable more by dust than by colouring from the grassless waste through which it wound.

The stranger, who was habited in a collarless Crimean shirt and rather dilapidated habiliments generally, rode his emaciated steed steadily on at the slow, hopeless, leg-weary jog to which most of the horses of the territory had long been reduced, until he reached the garden gate. Ernest, taking him for granted as the usual ‘reporter’ of travelling sheep, about to clear off the last fragments of what once had been pasture; an invalid shepherd, making for the Drewarrina Hospital; a mounted tramp or ‘traveller’ looking for work, with no great hope of, or indeed concern about, finding it; or lastly, a supernumerary for some travelling stock caravan, who had been ‘hunted’ for drunkenness or inefficiency, raised not his head. For any or all of these toilers of the waste there would be the unvarying hospitality of the men’s hut. But the stranger sat calmly upon his despondent horse at the gate surveying Ernest’s exceedingly efficient spade performance with apparent approval, until at length he broke silence. ‘My word, Mr. Noochamp, you’re nigh as good as a Chinaman. You’d make wages at post-hole digging, if the rain forgets to come and we’re all smothered. How’s those AD store cattle getting on?’

Ernest looked up hastily and indignantly at the first tones of the stranger’s accost, but immediately relaxed his visage and flung down his spade as he recognised in the horseman’s countenance the grave, reflective lineaments of Abstinens Levison.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN the strange exceptional condition of nervous tension up to which that marvellous instrument, the human 'harp of a thousand strings,' is capable of being wound, under the pressure of dread and perplexity, there is a type of visitor whose face is always hailed with pleasure. This is a fact as unquestionable as the converse proposition. For the *bien-venu* under such delicate and peculiar circumstances, helpfulness, sympathy, and decision are indispensable. Of no avail are weakly condolences or mild assenting pity. The power to dispense substantial aid may or may not be wanting. But the friend in need must have the moral power and clearness of mental vision which render decisiveness possible and just. His fiat, favourable or unfavourable, lets in the light, separates real danger from undefined terror, offers security for well-grounded hope, or persuades to the calmness of resignation.

A man so endowed, in a very unusual degree, was Mr. Levison. Deriving his leading characteristics from Nature's gift—very scantily supplemented by education—he yet possessed the rare qualities of apprehensive acuteness, intrepidity, and discrimination, in such measure and proportion as a hundred prize-takers at competitive examinations might have vainly hoped to emulate. Like that Australian judge, of whom the American citizen, in an inland assize town, is reported to have said, 'Wal, Judge Shortcharge may be right, or he may be wrong, but he *decides*. I go for the judge myself.'

Abstinent Levison much resembled that brief but weighty legal luminary, in that, after due consideration of any case concerning which he was minded to give judgment, his verdict was clear and irrevocable.

For this reason the soul of Ernest Neuchamp was glad within him at the prospect of hearing from the lips of the grave, undemonstrative, unwavering pastoralist words of comfort or of rebuke, which would be to him as the Oracles of the Gods.

'Jump off and come in,' he said. 'Delighted to see you—horse knocked up as usual? We'll take the saddle off here, and

let him pick at those reeds, they're better than nothing. I was having a go-in at the garden here, just to take it out of myself a little, and forget my annoyances. But we must have some breakfast, though we are all going to be ruined, as you say—and it looks very like it.'

As Mr. Neuchamp in his revulsion of feeling rattled off these greetings, partly in welcome and partly in explanation, his guest removed the saddle and several folds of blanket from the very prominent vertebrae of his gaunt courser, watching him roll and then attack the scantily furnished reed-bed, with much satisfaction.

'Where did you come from this morning?' inquired Ernest of his guest, as, after a prolonged visit to the bath-room, they sat down to breakfast; 'you must have made a very early start if you came from Mildool.'

'I camped on the river,' said Mr. Levison, attacking the corned beef in a deliberate but determined manner; 'in the bend, just below those free-selecting friends of yours; you don't seem to have been getting on well with 'em lately, from what they say.'

'We are not on good terms, I must admit,' replied Mr. Neuchamp, with a slight air of embarrassment, recollecting Levison's prophecy of evil, which had been verified to the letter; 'but it is entirely their own fault. I was much deceived in them.'

'Very like,' answered that gentleman, with as near an approach to a smile as his grave features ever permitted. 'It takes a smart man to be up to chaps of their sort.'

'Did you stay there?' asked Ernest, anxious to lead the conversation into a less unsatisfactory channel; 'they have not made themselves a very convenient dwelling.'

'No!' replied Mr. Levison, preferring a request for another instalment of the cold round of beef. 'I never stay at a place if I'm going to make a deal. It makes a difference in the bargain, I always think; and I wanted to make a little deal with those chaps, from what I heard as I came up the river.'

'A deal?' said Ernest, with some surprise; 'and how did you get on? I shouldn't have thought they had much to sell.'

'Well, they've got a middling lot of quiet cattle for one thing; they're regular crawlers, but none the worse for that if grass ever grows again. Then they've got, what with their selections and pre-emptives, a tidy slice, and of not the worst part, of Rainbar run. And as there was a friend of mine that a small place like that would suit, and the cattle and the few sheep, at a price—at a price,' he continued, with slow earnestness—'why—I'll ask for another cup of tea—I had an hour's mighty hard dealing, and bought the whole jimbang right out.'

'Indeed!' said Ernest, gratified in one sense, but slightly alarmed at the idea of a second pastoral proprietor being introduced into the sacred demesne of Rainbar; 'but they

have to fulfil their residence condition, haven't they, according to the Land Act?'

'Of course I made *that* all right,' affirmed the senior colonist. 'They're bound down to reside till their time is up, and they don't get the balance of their money till they can convey, all square and legal. They didn't know me, as luck would have it, and I dropped to their being very eager to sell out. These kind of chaps never look ahead beyond their noses, whereby I had 'em pretty well at my own price, for cash—cash, you know. A fine thing is cash, when you take care of it, and bring it out like an ace. It takes all before it.'

'What did you give for the cattle?' asked Ernest, with melancholy interest.

'Well, these small holders always believe the end of the world's come when they find themselves landed in a real crusher of a dry season. They think the weather is bound to keep set fair for a lifetime. I showed 'em how their cattle was falling off, and at last they offered the lot all round at eight and sixpence—no calves given in, except regular staggering Bobs. And so my friend has the run, and the stock, and the pre-emptu all in his own hands. He'll do well out of 'em, or I'm much mistaken.'

'And does your friend propose to come and live here?'

'Well, he might, and he might not. I think I'll take another egg—fine things eggs in a dry season. I expect your fowls live on grasshoppers pretty much. You see, if he could get two or three fellows as he could depend on to take up some more of the best bits of the bends, leaving a slice here and a slice there—so as it's not worth any one else's while to come in, because they'd have no pre-emptive worth talking of—he'd be able to keep all that angle pretty well to himself, and I believe it will keep well on it a thousand head of cattle some day.'

'I'm afraid it will spoil the sale of the run,' said Ernest, with some diffidence; 'not that it will matter to me much, as I shall have to sell out whether or no, and at present prices there will be little if anything left. You will have to take your cattle back if they're not paid for.'

'Well, I don't say but what it *might* spoil the sale of the run, especially if my friend was to be wide awake and take up his fresh selections with judgment. And don't you think, now,' Mr. Levison interrogated, fixing his clear gray eyes full upon Ernest's countenance, 'as it was a blind trick of yours to go and bring these chaps here, like a lot of catarrhed sheep, all among your own stock, just to make it hot for yourself and crab the sale of the run, supposing you wanted to sell?'

Mr. Neuchamp had in his hours of remorse and repentance sufficiently gone over the ground of his errors and miscalculations, so as to be very fully convinced of the folly of this his most indefensible proceeding. He had been thirsting for the words of the oracle. Now that the hollow sounds came from

Dodona's oak, he liked not their purport. The spirit of his ancestors, temporarily oppressed by misfortune, awoke in his breast, and he thus made answer: 'My dear sir, I am most willing to own that I have in this matter acted unwisely. And the more I see of this great but perplexing country, the more ready I am to admit that extreme caution is necessary in many transactions where such need does not appear on the surface. But I have acted in this, and in all other stages of my Australian career, upon the principle of attempting to do good to my fellow-creatures, and of raising the standard of human happiness and culture. Such motives I hold to be the true foundation of every instructed, christianised, and, therefore, permanent community. Want of success may have attended my efforts to carry out these ideas; but of such efforts and endeavours, whatever may be the result, I trust I shall never feel ashamed!'

As Mr. Neuchamp uttered the concluding words of this vindication of his faith with a kindling eye and slightly raised tone, he held his head erect and looked with a fixed and rather stern regard at Mr. Levison, as if defying all the Paynim hosts of selfishness and monopoly.

Mr. Levison met his gaze with a moment's searching glance, and then, with a relapse into his ordinary expression of judicial calculation, thus answered—

'I ain't going to say that you are acting altogether wrong in trying to right things in a general way in life. There's more than you has noticed a lot of wrong turns and breakdowns for want of a finger-post or two. And I like to see a man back his opinion right through, whether it's right or wrong. But if you lose your team, and break your pole, and spoil your loading when you're on a long overland trip, how are you to help your mates or any other chap that's bogged when they want you to double-bank? That's what I look at. You've got to stand and look on, just like a broke loafer or a coach passenger. What I say, and what I stick to, is that a man should make sure, and double sure, of his own footing, and *then* he can wire in and haul out any man, woman, or child as he takes a fancy to put on firm ground. But, if you go too fast, and your agent drops you, and you want to help a fellow, why, you're bust, and he's bust, and what can either of ye do but sit on your stern fixings and look at each other?'

Mr. Levison's illustrations were homely, but they had a force and application which Ernest fully recognised.

'You have the truth on your side,' he said, after a pause. 'I see it now—very plainly, too. I wonder why I could not see it before.'

'There's a deal of studying required, it seems to me,' pronounced his eccentric mentor, 'and a deal of experience, and knocking about, and loss of time and money, too, before a man comes to see the *right thing at the right time*. That's where the hardship all lies. If the thing's right and the time's wrong,

that's no good. And the right time and the wrong thing is worse again. What you've been a-doin' of ain't so much wrong in itself—only the time's wrong, *that's* where your mistake is—except things take a great start soon; and I don't say they won't, mind you.'

Here Mr. Levison looked at Ernest with an expression half humorous, half prophetic, so extremely unusual that the latter began to wonder whether there was any case on record of half a dozen cups of tea having produced temporary insanity. But the unaccustomed gleam departed suddenly from the dark, steadfast gray eyes, and the countenance resumed its wonted cast of calm investigation and unalterable decision.

'Does old Frankston ever give you a dressing down in the advice line?' inquired Mr. Levison, without continuing the development of the idea he had last started. 'Because if he does, you'd have a bad time of it between us. But I've done all the preaching part of the story for this time, and I'm a-going on to the second chapter. Do you know the friend's name as I bought these Freeman chaps out for?'

'No,' said Ernest. 'I shall be happy to afford him all the assistance I can—that is, if I'm here, you know,' he added, with sudden reflection.

'That's all right; but he's a youngish chap, and easy had. Will you promise to advise him to live economically, mind his business till times improve, and not waste his money, above all things? Tell him I said so.'

'I don't think I am the best adviser you could pick in that way,' said Ernest. 'I am too sensible of my own defects; but I will deliver your message and add my feeble weight to the influence of your name.'

'That's all right, and handsomely said. Now, my friend's name is Ernest Neuchamp! I've bought the land and the cattle for him. They're cheap enough if he never pays me for them, but I believe he will, and that those Freeman chaps will be biting their fingers at letting theirselves go so cheap this time next year. But, mind you tell him not to waste his money. Tell him Levison said so. Ha, ha! I must start now.'

Mr. Levison laughed for the first time since Ernest had made his acquaintance. It must have been the sight of Ernest's wonder-stricken face which caused this unprecedented though brief incongruity.

'I can never sufficiently thank you,' he said; 'but where's the money to come from? The station will never pay it.'

'That's more than you can know,' answered the Changer of Destinies; 'it's more than I know, too. I don't mind telling you—as I said before—you're not likely to interfere much with any man's profits. But cattle are *going to rise*, and that to no foolish price. You mark my words. Before this time twelve months fat cattle will be worth five pounds a head, as sure as my name's Ab. Levison. And if rain comes—and I've seen some

signs that I have great dependence on—store cattle will be two and three pounds a head, and hard to buy at that.'

These last words he uttered with great solemnity, and Mr. Neuchamp perceived that he was fully imbued with faith in his own vaticinations.

'I hope it may be so,' Ernest replied. 'Good heavens! what a wonderful change it would make in everything. But why should stock rise so?'

'Because the *yield of gold* is increasing every day and every hour in these colonies. Don't you see the papers? I thought you was sure to have read everything. Why, you are not half posted up. Look here!'

Here he produced from one of his capacious pockets a much worn and closely printed Melbourne *Argus*, in which mention was made of 'the astonishing discovery of gold near Bunninyong at Mr. Yuille's station, commonly known as Ballarat, in such quantity and richness as bade fair to rival the hitherto exhaustless yields of Turonia and California. Great excitement had taken place. Melbourne was deserted. You could not get your hair cut. The barristers were gone, leaving the judges lamenting. The doctors had followed their patients. The clergymen had followed their flocks. The shepherds had deserted theirs. All society existed in a state of dislocation!'

'Now,' he continued, receiving the journal from Ernest, and carefully refolding and returning it to its place of safety, 'do you see what all this gold breaking out here and there and all about means?'

'For the present the Melbourne people seem to think it means loss, if not ruin, to them. The shepherds have nearly all run away, it seems, as also labourers of every description. The writer anticipates a great fall in the value of property. Indeed, houses and town allotments are considered to be hardly worth holding. I should have thought otherwise myself, but' (here Ernest looked at his companion) 'I begin to doubt the correctness of my own opinions.'

'Well, that writer's an ass, whoever he is; and you're a deal nearer the mark than he is. He's a donkey, that, because there ain't a thistle right against his nose, thinks there ain't no more thistles in the world—let alone corn. Now I've been thinkin' and thinkin' the whole matter over since a friend of mine in Port Phillip sent me this paper, and I cipher it out this way. They've sent down five thousand ounces this week from this place, Ballarat. Then they've struck it at Forest Creek, fifty miles off. Well, that tells me that there's plenty of it, and more than years will see out, judging from California and Turonia, as we know of. Now what do you suppose all Europe—all the world—will do when they hear of this, that you can dig up gold like potatoes? Why, they won't be able to find ships fast enough to bring 'em here. When they do come they'll want to be fed. The tea and sugar and tents and spades and shovels

old Paul Frankston and the other merchants will find 'em somehow; the flour the farmers will find them, or if they can't, old Paul and his friends will get it from Chili. *But they can't import beef and mutton.* No; not if meat rose to a shilling a pound. Live stock is the worst freight in the world, and there's nowhere within boating distance where it grows plentiful as it does here. So when my sum's worked out it means this, that more gold means double and treble the population, and double and treble the price of everything that we have here and want to sell.'

As Mr. Levison paused, not for breath, for he did not exceed his ordinary slow monotonal enunciation, as he propounded these original and startling ideas much as though he were reading from a book. Mr. Neuchamp looked fixedly at his guest, as if to discover whether or no some subtle local influence peculiar to Rainbar had infected with speculative mania the shrewd, calm-judging stockholder.

But the *genius loci*, however seductive, would have fared ill in a mental encounter with the slow, sure inferences and iron logic of Abstinens Levison. He displayed no trace of more than ordinary interest. And from all that was apparent, the onward march of a revolution fated to flood the land with wealth and to change a handful of pioneer communities into a nation, was accepted by him with the same faint unnoted surprise as would have been the announcement of a glut in the cattle market or the 'sticking up' of the down river mail coach.

'That's how it is in my mind,' he slowly continued, as if pursuing his ordinary train of thoughts, 'and before we meet again you'll know all about it. I'm off to Melbourne as soon as I can get on to the mail line. I shall buy stock right and left, and pick up as many cottages and town allotments as I can find with good titles. They'll be like these Freeman store cattle; cent per cent will be a trifle to what profits are to be had out of them. But all this yarning won't buy the child a frock. Where's that young man of yours? I want to leave my horse and saddle in his charge.'

'Where are you going now?' asked Ernest. 'How can you get over to the mail station without a horse? It's a hundred and eighty miles to Wargan, where the coach line comes in.'

'It's only thirty miles to Wood-duck Lagoon, where the horse mail passes,' said his determined guest. 'I left word for them down at Mingadee to send a led horse by the mailman for me to-morrow. Johnny Daly's an old stockman of mine, and one of those chaps that when he says he'll do a thing he always does it. I'm as sure of finding a horse there at ten o'clock to-morrow as if I saw him now.'

'But suppose he loses him on the way, or don't find your horse ready at Mingadee, what then? Hadn't you better take a man and horse from here?'

'Well, I don't say Johnny would *steal* a horse, out and out, if

he knew I expected one at a certain hour ; he's a good boy, though he does come from the Weddin Mountains. But he'd *have* one for me, some road or other, if there wasn't one nearer than Bargo Brush. As for your horses, I'm obliged, and know I'm welcome, but it would knock up one going and one coming back, for they're all as poor as crows, and that don't pay, besides a man's time for nothing. I've plenty of time, and the night's the best travelling weather now. If you'll call this native chap I'll be off.'

Ernest, though extremely loath to let his friend and benefactor depart on foot—of which, as a mode of progression, he was beginning to acquire the Australian opinion, viz. that it wore a poverty-stricken appearance—could not decently oppose Mr. Levison's fixed desire to take the road. He therefore called up Jack Windsor, to whose care Mr. Levison solemnly confided his emaciated quadruped, a much worn and sunburned saddle and bridle, together with a considerable portion of gray blanket, which, in many folds, did duty as saddle-cloth.

'Now, young man,' he said solemnly, walking aside with Mr. Windsor, 'you take care of these and my old horse. Give them to nobody without he brings Mr. Cottonbush's written order ; do you hear ? That's as good a stock horse and journey hack as ever you crossed, though he's low now.'

'He is *very* low !' averred Jack, looking at the bare-ribbed spectral but well-formed animal that was grazing within a few yards of the spot, 'but he may get over it. I'll take a look at him night and morning, and see that he's lifted regular if he gets down.'

'All right,' said his master. 'I had to lift him myself this morning, and very hard work I had to get him up. But if it rains within the next two months you'll have him kicking up his heels like a colt.'

'Are you going to walk to Wood-duck Lagoon, sir ?' inquired Jack respectfully.

'Yes, I am, and no great matter either,' returned the exceptionally wiry capitalist. '*I'm* right enough ; don't you trouble about me. What you and young Banks have to look out for is, to keep all these Circle Dot cattle well within bounds till the weather breaks, and then you can't go wrong, and I look upon Mr. Neuchamp's pile as made. I've taken to him, more than a bit. Besides, he's got another good back, though he don't know it. I've bought out the Freemans, stock, lock, and barrel, so their cattle won't bother you any more.'

Here Mr. Windsor gave a leap off the ground, and cast his cabbage-tree hat violently from his curly brown locks in another direction.

'Yes, I've bought 'em pretty right ; they didn't know me, or they'd have stuck it on—bought 'em *for a friend* ! So they'll have the pleasure of seeing you and Banks branding the

increase next year, just as they are giving up possession ; and the calves will be worth more then than I paid for the cows yesterday. But I might be mistaken, you know.'

'It would be for the first time ; so they all used to say at Boocalthra,' answered Jack.

'You were there, then?' said Mr. Levison, bending his extremely discriminating gaze upon the bronzed, resolute face. 'Now I remember your brand ; you were the curly-headed boy that used to ride the colts for the horse-breaker. Glad you turned out steady. I didn't expect it. Stick to Rainbar ; now you're in a good place, and you'll do well. But whatever you do, if you walk your feet off, don't let these Circle Dot cows and heifers get out of bounds till the rain comes. If you are regularly beat, go down to Mingadee ; there's a hundred and fifty stock horses there, spelling for next winter's work, and Cottonbush will have my orders to let you have half a dozen. I know what fresh cattle are in a season like this. Well, good-bye, Jack the Devil ; I remember all about you now.' Mr. Windsor grinned, yet preserved an air of diffidence. 'Take care of the old horse, and don't you lend that saddle to no one !'

With these parting words tending to thrift, in curious contradistinction to the tenor of his action at Rainbar, Mr. Levison proceeded to take a hurried leave of his entertainer.

'I've just been talking to that native chap of yours,' he said, 'about my old horse. He wants a bit of looking after now, but you'd be surprised to see what style he has when he's in good fettle. Wonderful horse on a camp. Best cutting-out horse, this day, on the river. Pulls rather hard, that's the worst of him.'

Mr. Neuchamp, who, having as yet not gone through the terrible trials of a prolonged drought, had never witnessed the incredible emaciation to which stock may be reduced, and their rapid and magical transformation at the wand of the enchanter 'Rain,' looked as if he really *would* be surprised at the tottering, hollow-eyed, fleshless spectre, in appearance something between an expiring poley cow and an anatomical preparation, 'pulling hard' again, or doing any deed of valour as a charger.

'Ah ! you'll be all in the fashion, then,' said Mr. Levison, with his customary affirmative expression, which apparently meant that having asserted his opinion it was waste of time to attempt to prove it. 'When old BI (that's what the men call him, his name's written on him pretty big) kicks up his heels, it'll mean that Rainbar's *worth twenty thousand pounds* ! That's why I want you to be careful, and not waste your money and get sold up just before the tide turns. How's that Arab horse-breeding notion turned out ? They'd fetch about three pound a head all round just now.'

'Very well, so far ; they're a little poor, but nothing could

look more promising than the yearlings—plenty of bone, and as handsome as you could make them. I should grieve more about their forced sale than anything.'

'Well, you're not sold up yet, and won't be if you'll be careful and take my advice and Paul Frankston's. You mark me, horses will be horses in a year or two. They're hardly worth owning now; but their turn's coming, with everything else that any man will have to sell in Australia for the next ten years.'

Mr. Levison placed the few necessary articles which he had abstracted from his valise, in the moiety of the gray blanket which he had apparently not required as a saddle-cloth. He requested leave to cut off and to take with him a fair-sized section of damper, sternly refusing any other description of edible. Then, turning his face to the broad plain, he held out his hand to Ernest, and finally exhorting him not to waste his money, addressed himself to the far-stretching trail after such a fashion as convinced Ernest that he was no inexperienced pedestrian.

Mr. Neuchamp returned to his cottage in a very different frame of mind from that which characterised his pre-matutinal discipline in the garden. How short a time, how trifling an incident, occasionally suffices to turn the scale from anxiety to repose, from despair to glowing hope. This last cheering mental condition was indispensably necessary to Mr. Neuchamp's acceptance of burdens, even to his very life. He had gone forth in the clear dawnlight a miserable man, racked by presentiments of scorn unalterable to come, gazing on 'Ruin's red letters writ in flame,' and associated with the hitherto untarnished fame and sufficing fortune of Ernest Neuchamp; he had heard in imagination the laugh of scorn, the half-contemptuous, pitying condolence. Now, though much remained uncertain and unsafe, the blessed flower of Hope had recommenced to bloom. Its fragrance was once more shed over the soul of the fainting pilgrim through life's desert, and the wayfarer arose refreshed and invigorated, free once more to turn his brow erect and undaunted towards the Mecca of his dreams.

This particular morning happened to be that of the bi-weekly post-day, a day to which Mr. Neuchamp had looked forward of late with considerably more apprehension than interest. How wonderfully different, as the years roll on, are the feelings with which that humble messenger of fate, the postman, is greeted! In life's careless spring he is the custodian of friendship's offering, the distributor of the small sweet joys of childhood, the dawning intellectual pleasures of youth, the rose-hued, enchanting flower-tokens of love. As the days of the years of our pilgrimage roll on, 'the air is full of farewells to the dying and mournings for the dead.' How altered is the character of the missives which lie motionless,

but charged with subtle, terrible forces!—electric agents they!—thrilling or rending the vital frame from that overcharged battery, the heart!

To this undesirable tenor and complexion had much of Mr. Neuchamp's correspondence, drought-leavened and gloomy, arrived. Many of his smaller accounts were of necessity left unpaid. The cruel season, unchanged in the more vital characteristic of periodic moisture, seemed to be culminating in an apparently fixed and fatal determination on the part of Messrs. Oldstyle and Crampton to let him have no more money on account.

But several minor matters, on this particular day, besides the visit of Mr. Levison, seemed to point to Fortune's more indulgent mood. The pile of letters and papers was pleasantly, if not hopefully, variegated by those periodicals and peculiarly stamped envelopes which denote the delivery of the European mail. Upon these Ernest dashed with unconcealed eagerness, and tearing open a letter in his brother Courtenay's delicate Italian handwriting, utterly devoid of linear emphasis, read as follows :

NEUCHAMPSTEAD, 6th March 18—.

DEAR ERNEST—I cannot acknowledge surprise at the contents of your last letter, having always looked for some such ending to your colonial adventure. The day of success for such enterprises has gone by—if indeed *any one* ever was really successful at any time in such wanderings and Quixotisms. You quote the greater examples. Yet a little temporary notoriety, chiefly ending in imprisonment or the block, was the guerdon of Columbus and one Raleigh, instances which occur to me. As I have said before, I have no doubt that our family would have substantially benefited by remaining on their paternal fiords and leaving Normandy and England to the robbers and hangers-on who followed the popular pirate of the day. Being in England, I suppose we shall have to stay, though the climate daily recommends itself less to any one whose epidermis does not resemble a suit of armour. The crops have been bad this year. The tenants are slow and deficient. No one seems to have any money except certain Liverpool or Manchester persons, born with an aptitude for swindling in 'gray shirtings,' cotton twist, racehorses, or other equally plausible instrument for gambling. I spend little and risk nothing. So I may hope to survive in my insignificance, unless the grand Radical earthquake, which will surely swallow England's aristocracy of birth and culture in a coming day, be antedated. All men of family who dabble in agriculture, commerce, or colonisation, are earthen pots which must inevitably be shattered by the aggressive flotilla of brazen vessels which encumbers every tide nowadays. You will admit I had no expectation of other result than your ruin when you embarked. In announcing that fact spare me the details. You will find your old rooms ready at Neuchampstead, and refurnished. I have been extravagant in some curious antique furniture.

I enclose a draft for three thousand pounds. Such a sum is of no use to a gentleman in England. Fling it after the rest. It may console you, years hence, when you are adding Australian pollen masses to the famous collection of orchids for which *alone* Neuchampstead is celebrated,

that your experiment had full justice. It is only the bourgeois who leaves the table before his 'system' is fairly tried.—Good-bye, my dear brother. Yours sincerely,
COURTENAY NEUCHAMP.

P.S.—I forgot to add that I gave Augusta your message. How could you be so incautious? I would have suppressed it, but had, of course, no option. She starts for Sydney by the mail steamer. Are the women in Australia so obstinate? But they are much the same everywhere, I apprehend.—C. N.

The first emotion which Mr. Neuchamp experienced after reading this characteristic letter was one of unqualified delight. The sight of the draft for the three thousand pounds, so slightly alluded to by Courtenay, was as the vision of the palm-trees at the well to the fainting desert pilgrim, of the distant sail to the gaunt, perishing seaman on the drifting raft—the symbol of blessed hope, of assured deliverance. The capital sum, or the trifling annual income derivable from it, in gold-flooded England, might be of little utility there, as Courtenay had averred with the humorous indifferentism which he professed. But *here*, in this rich unwatered level, metaphorically and otherwise, it was like the river-born trickling tunnels with which, since forgotten Pharaoh days, the toiling fellaheen saturate the black gaping Nile gardens, sure precursor of profound vegetation and the hundred-fold increase.

No use to a gentleman in England! A company of guardian angels must surely have wafted to him the precious, delicate document across the seas, across the desert here. What use would it not be to him, Ernest? It would pay in full for the Circle Dot store cattle, also for those purchased from Freeman Brothers, leaving a balance to the credit of his account with those treasure-guarding griffins, Oldstile and Crampton. Besides, the bills due to Levison for the store cattle were not due for several months yet. In the meantime rain or other wonders might happen. The young horses, too, children of Omar, fleet son of the desert, with delicately-formed aristocratic heads, deerlike limbs, which had been dear to him almost as their ancestors had been to some lonely subdivision of the wandering Shammar or Aneezah! They were saved from ruin and disgrace—saved from the indignity of passing for the merest trifle into the possession of unheeding vulgar purchasers, who would probably stigmatise them as weeds, wanting in bone, or by any other cheap form of ignorant depreciation.

Saved! saved! saved! All was saved. Once more secure. Once more his own. Once more the land and the grazing herd, the humble abode, the garden, the paddock, even the long-neglected but not despaired-of canal, all the acted resolves and outcome of a sincere but perhaps over-sanguine mind, dearer than ever were they to him, their author and projector. They were his own again. How like Courtenay, too! Ever better than his word; incredulous as to improved benefits and suc-

cesses ; deprecating haste, risk, imprudence ; doubtful of all but the garnered grain, the assayed gold, the concrete and the absolute in life—but, in the hour of need, sparing of that counsel which is but another name for reproach, stanch in aid, generous alike in the mode and measure of his gift.

Having recovered from this natural exaltation and relief at the unexpected succour, Mr. Neuchamp turned to the consideration of the very important postscript of his brother's letter with apprehension.

Had his cousin, Miss Augusta Neuchamp, really sailed and arrived in Sydney, as would appear ? If so, where was she to go ? What was he to do ? She could hardly come to Rainbar to take up her abode in this small cottage, which, though possessing several rooms, was, like many dwellings in the bush proper, practically undivided as to sound ; the conversation of any one, in any given room, being equally beneficial and entertaining to the occupant of any other. Then there was not a woman upon the whole establishment. The wives and daughters of the Freemans, even if the latter were eligible for ladies' maids, were little less than hostile.

A residence in Sydney seemed the only possible plan ; but he knew his cousin too well to think that there would be no drawback to that arrangement. Energetic, well-intentioned, possessing a clear available intelligence, and considerable mental force, when exercised within certain well-defined, but it must be confessed narrow limits, Augusta Neuchamp was a benevolent despot in her own way. She ardently desired to arrange the destinies of the classes or individuals who came within the sphere of her action in accordance with what *she* considered to be the plain intentions of Providence with regard to them. Of the tremendous issues involved in such a translation, she had no conception. Plain to bluntness in her speech, she rarely evaded the awkwardness of expressing disappointment. Unquestionably refined by habit and education, she possessed little imagination and less tact. Thus she rarely failed to provide herself, in any locality which she honoured with her presence, with a large and increasing supply of opponents, if not of enemies. A moderate private income enabled her to indulge her tastes for improving herself or others. Possessing no very near relatives, she was uncontrolled as to her movements and mode of life. She had reached the age of twenty-five, though by no means unprepossessing in appearance, without finding any suitor sufficiently valorous to adopt or oppose, in the character of a husband, her very clearly expressed views of life. Had she consented to reserve a modification in these important respects, her friends averred that she might have been 'settled' ere now. But such palterings with principle were alien and abhorrent to the nature of Augusta Neuchamp. And Augusta Neuchamp she had accordingly remained.

The appearance of Miss Neuchamp was generally described as

commanding, although she was slightly, if at all, over the medium height of woman. But there was an expression about her high-bridged aquiline nose and compressed lips which left no one in doubt as to the fact that, in controversy or contending action, the first to yield would *not* be the possessor of those features. Her clear blue eyes would have been handsome had there been a shade of doubt or softness at any time visible. Such a moment of feminine weakness never came. They looked at you and through you and over you, but never fell in maiden doubt or fear beneath your gaze. Two courses were open to the individual of the conflicting sex in her presence—unconditional surrender or flight.

It was hard, Ernest thought, that just as he was relieved from one anxiety he should be provided by unkind Fate with another. He revolved the imminent question of the disposition of Miss Augusta Neuchamp in his mind until prevented by mutual apprehension from pursuing the terribly perplexing subject. Of all people in the wide world, he thought his cousin was the most impracticable, the most unyielding to argument, the most certain to expose herself to dislike and ridicule in Australia. She knew everything. She believed nothing, unless indeed it related to herself or proceeded directly from that source. Everything which differed from her stereotyped system was wrong, ruinous, degenerate, or provincial. How she would criticise the place, the people, the climate, the railways, the houses, the fences, the workmen, the men and the women, the grass, and the gum-trees!

If he could only persuade her to take lodgings in Sydney, until he could go down and argue the point with her, much might be gained. Antonia Frankston would visit her, and harder than adamant must she be if that gentle voice and natural manner did not convert her to a favourable opinion of Australian life.

No such preparatory process was possible. A letter arrived from the fair emigrant which left no doubt of her immediate intentions. It ran thus:

DEAR COUSIN ERNEST—I have dared the perils of the deep, not the least for your sake, but *me voici*. I made a short stay in Sydney, but being extremely tired of the dust and mosquitoes, I decided upon the course of travelling by rail and coach to your far-away estate at once. [Here Ernest groaned, a suspicious sound which might have been in sympathy for the trials of a lonely if not distressed damsel, or an expression of despondency at the idea of his own inevitable cares and anxieties, such as must attend the entertainment of the first lady-guest ever seen at Rainbar. He continued the reading of the epistle.] If Sydney had been a more interesting place I might have lingered for a week or two so as to exchange letters with you. Had it possessed that foreign air which one finds so pleasant in many continental spots, otherwise dull enough, I could have amused myself. But being, as it is, a second-hand copy of a provincial British town—I grant you the botanical element is lovely,

though neglected—I could not endure another week. I seemed to long for the desert, in all its vastness and grandeur, where your abode is placed. It was like staying in an Algerian town, a dwarfed and dirty Paris, full of *cafés* and shabby Frenchmen playing at dominoes. I had no lady acquaintances. There *are* a few, I suppose. So I grew desperate, and took my passage through the agency company; Cobb, I think, is the name. If you have no phaeton or dogcart available, you might bring a saddle-horse for me.—Your affectionate cousin,

AUGUSTA NEUCHAMP.

Just after the perusal of this letter, which showed that Miss Neuchamp's angles still stood out as sharply as those of a Theban obelisk—the voyage and change of sky notwithstanding—Mr. Neuchamp was startled by the sudden appearance of Piambook, who rushed into his presence with an air of sincere discomposure very different from that of his usual unimpressible demeanour. His rolling dark eyes gleamed—his features worked—his mouth, slightly open, could only articulate the borrowed phrase of his conquerors, 'My word! my word!' It was for some moments the only sound that could be extracted from him by Ernest's inquiries.

'What is it, Piambook?' at length demanded Ernest, so decidedly, almost fiercely, that his sable retainer capitulated.

'Me look out longa wheelbarrow,' he explained at length. He had been despatched to a distant point of the run at a very early hour of the morning.

'Well, what did you see?' pursued his master. 'You can yabber fast enough when you like.'

'That one wheelbarrow plenty broket,' explained the observing pre-Adamite. 'Mine see um longa plain—plenty sit down—liket three fellow wheel. Billy Robinson, he go longa township.'

'Well, what then? the coach broke down; that's not wonderful—passengers walked, I suppose.'

'Me seeum that one white-fellow gin,' quoth Piambook, in a low, mysterious voice. Then, bursting into an immoderate fit of laughter, he continued, 'That one carry liket spyglass.' Here he placed his thumb and forefinger, circularly contracted, to his eye, and, gazing at Mr. Neuchamp, again laughed till his dusky orbs were dim.

Mr. Neuchamp at once comprehended by this pantomime the gold eyeglass which Miss Augusta, partially short-sighted, habitually wore; and becoming uneasy as to her state and condition under the circumstances of a presumed breakdown, asked eagerly of his follower what she was doing.

'That one sit along a wheelbarrow, liket this one;' here he took up a book from Ernest's table and pretended to look into it with great and absorbed interest.

'Anybody in the coach, Piambook?'

'One fellow Chinaman,' returned the messenger with cool indifference.

After this information Mr. Neuchamp at once perceived that no time must be lost. Augusta could not be left a moment longer than was necessary, sitting in a disabled coach in the midst of a boundless plain, with a Chinaman for her *vis-à-vis*. What a situation for a young lady to whom Baden was as familiar as Brompton, Paris as Piccadilly, Rome, Florence, Venice, as the stations on the Eastern Counties Railway! He did not believe she was afraid. She was afraid of nothing. But the situation was embarrassing.

The hawk-eyed Piambook had descried the stranded coach—the wheelbarrow, as his comrades called it—on the mail track, about a mile off his path of duty. It was full twelve miles from Rainbar. In a quarter of an hour the express waggon with two cheerful but enfeebled steeds stumbled and blundered along at a very different pace from that of Mr. Parklands, when he rattled up Ernest to the Rainbar door, on the occasion of their first memorable drive.

However, the distance from home was luckily short, and in about two hours Mr. Neuchamp arrived at the spot where, in the disabled coach, sat Miss Augusta Neuchamp, possessing her soul in *impatience*, and gradually coming to the conclusion that Ah Ling—who sat stolidly staring at her and regretting the loss of time which might have been spent in watering his garden or smoking opium, the only two occupations he ever indulged in—was about to rob and perhaps murder her. As she always carried a small revolver, and was by no means ignorant of its use, it is possible that Ah Ling was in greater danger than he was aware of. His fair neighbour would infallibly have shot him had he made any hasty or incautious motion.

When Mr. Neuchamp rumbled up in his useful but not imposing vehicle, a slight shade of satisfaction overspread her features.

‘Oh, Ernest, I am delighted to see you; however did you find out my position? Don’t you think it was inexcusable of the coach company to send us all this way in a damaged vehicle? I thought all your coaching arrangements were so perfect.’

‘Accidents will happen, my dear Augusta,’ said Ernest, ‘in all companies and communities, you know. Cobb and Co. are the best of fellows in the main. But *whatever* induced you to come up into this wild place without writing to me first? Have you not suffered all kinds of hardship and disagreeables?’

‘Well, perhaps a few; but I knew all about the country from some books I read on the voyage out. I studied the directory till I found out the coach lines; and I should not have complained but for this last blunder. But what a barren wilderness this all seems. I thought Australia was a land of rich pastures.’

‘So it is—but this is a drought. “And the famine was sore in the land.” You remember that in the Bible, don’t you? We

are a good deal like Palestine in our periodical lean years, except that they didn't import their flour from beyond sea, and we do.'

'But this looks so very bad!' said she, putting up her eyeglass and staring earnestly at the waste lands of the crown, which certainly presented a striking contrast to the Buckinghamshire meadows or uplands either. 'Why, it seems all sand and these scrubby-looking bushes; are you sure you haven't made a mistake and bought inferior land? A gentleman who came out with me said inexperienced persons often did.'

'My dear Augusta,' said Ernest, quelling a well-remembered feeling of violent antagonism, 'you must surely have forgotten that I have been more than two years in Australia, and may be supposed to know the difference between good country and bad by this time.'

'Do you?' said his fair cousin indifferently. 'Well, you must have improved. Courtenay says you are the most credulous person he knows; and as for Aunt Ermengarde, she says that, of all the failures the family has produced——'

'Please to spare me the old lady's review of my life and times,' said Ernest, waking up his bounding steeds. 'We never did agree, and it can serve no good purpose to further embitter my remembrance of her.'

'Oh, but she did not wish to say anything really disparaging of you, only that you were not of sufficiently coarse material to win success in farming, or trade, or politics.'

'Or colonisation, my dear Augusta. Perhaps she was not so far wrong, after all; but somehow one doesn't like to be told these things, and I must ask you and Aunt Ermengarde to suspend your judgment until the last scene of the third act. Then you will be able to applaud, or otherwise, on correct grounds. I think you will find the country and its ways by no means too easy to comprehend.'

'I expect nothing, simply, so I cannot be disappointed. It seems to me a sort of provincial England jumbled up with one's ideas of Mexico.'

'And the people?'

'I haven't noticed them much yet. I thought many of the women ridiculously overdressed in Sydney, copying our English fashions in a semi-tropical climate. I left everything behind except a few tourist suits.'

'And most extraordinary you look,' thought Ernest to himself, though he dared not say so, mentally contrasting the stern Augusta's dust-coloured tusser wrap, broad-leafed hat with green lining, rather stout boots, short dress, and flattened-down hair, with Antonia, cool, glistening, delicately robed, and rose-fresh, amid the bright-hued shrubberies of Morahmee, or even the Misses Middleton, perfectly *comme il faut*, on shipboard, in George Street, or at the station, as everybody ought to be, thought Ernest—unless she is an eccentric reformer, he was just

about to say, but refrained. Was any one else of his acquaintance going to do wonders in the alleviation and reformation of the Australian world? and if so, what had *he* accomplished? Had he not been in scores of instances self-convicted of the most egregious mistakes and miscalculations? After all his experience, was he not now indebted almost for his financial existence to certain of these very colonists whose intelligence he had formerly held so cheap?

These reflections were not suffered to proceed to an inconvenient length, being routed by the clear and not particularly musical tones of Miss Augusta's voice.

'I can't say much for Australian horses, so far, Ernest. I expected to see the fleet courser of the desert, and all that kind of thing. These seem wretched underbred creatures, and miserably poor.'

'Lives there the man, with soul so dead,' who doesn't mind hearing his horses run down?

'They are not bad horses, by any means, though low in condition, owing to this dreadful season,' answered Ernest, rather quickly. 'This one,' touching the off-side steed, 'is as good and fast and high-couraged a horse as ever was saddled or harnessed, but they have had nothing to eat for six months, to speak of. So they quite surpass the experience of the cabman's horse in *Pickwick*; and I can't afford to buy corn at a pound a bushel.'

'I forgot about the horse in *Pickwick*,' said Augusta, who, a steady reader in her own line, which she denominated 'useful,' had little appreciation of humour, and never could be got to know the difference between *Pickwick* and *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Charles O'Malley* and *The Knight of Gwynne*. 'But surely more neatness in harness and turn-out might be managed,' and she looked at the dusty American harness and rusty bits.

'You must remember, my dear Augusta, that you are not only in the provinces, but in the far far Bush, now—akin to the Desert—in more ways than one. I don't suppose the Sheik Abdallah turns out with very bright bits; but, if he does, he has the advantage of us in the labour supply. We are compelled to economise rigidly in that way.'

'You seem compelled to economise in every way that makes life worth having,' said his downright kinswoman. 'Does any one ever make any money at all here to compensate for the savage life you seem to lead?'

'Well, a few people do,' replied Ernest, half amused, half annoyed. 'If we had time to visit a little, not perhaps in this neighbourhood, I could show you places well kept and pretty enough, and people who would be voted fairly provided for even in England.'

'I have seen none as yet,' said Miss Neuchamp; 'but I believe much of the prosperity in the large towns is unreal. I met a very pleasant, gentlemanlike man in Sydney, in fact one of the

few gentlemen I did see there—a Mr. Croker, I think, was his name—who said it was all outside show, and that nobody had made any money in this colony, or ever would.’

‘Oh, Jermyn Croker,’ said Ernest, laughing; ‘you must not take him literally; he is a profound cynic, and must have been sent into the world expressly to counterbalance an equally pronounced optimist, myself for instance. That’s his line of humour, and very amusing it is—in its way.’

‘But does he not speak the truth?’ inquired the literal Augusta; ‘or is it not considered necessary in a colony?’

‘Of course he *intends* to do so, but like all men whose opinions are very strongly coloured by their individualism, which again is dominated by purely physical occurrences, such as bile, indigestion, and so on, he unconsciously takes a gloomy, depreciatory view of matters in general, which I, and perhaps others, think untrue and misleading.’

‘I believe in a right and a wrong about everything myself,’ said the young lady, ‘but I must say I feel inclined to agree with him so far.’

Ernest was on the point of asking her how she could possibly know, when the turrets of Rainbar appearing in sight, the conversation was diverted to that ‘hold’ and its surroundings, the danger of arriving in the midst of an altercation being thereby averted.

‘Allow me to welcome you to my poor home,’ said Mr. Neuchamp, driving up to the door of the cottage, and assisting her to alight. ‘I wish I had had notice of the honour of your visit, that we might have been suitably prepared.’

‘Stuff!’ said Miss Augusta. ‘Then you would have written to prevent me coming at all. I was determined to see how you were *really* getting on, and I never allow trifling discomforts to stand in the way of my resolves.’

‘I am aware of *that*, my dear Augusta,’ replied Mr. Neuchamp, with a slight mental shrug, in which he decided that the trifling discomforts alluded to occasionally involved others besides the heroine herself. ‘But can you do without a maid? I am afraid there is not a woman on the place.’

‘That’s a little awkward,’ confessed Miss Neuchamp. ‘I did not quite anticipate such a barrack-room state of matters. But is there none at the village, or whatever it is called, in the neighbourhood?’

‘I have a village on the run, I am sorry to say; but though we are at feud with the villagers, I did attempt to procure you a handmaid, and I will see what has been done.’

It was yet early in the day. Miss Neuchamp, being put into possession of the best bedroom, hastily arranged for her use and benefit, was told to consider herself as the sole occupant of the cottage for the present. Mr. Neuchamp in the meanwhile having ordered lunch, went over to the barracks to see if Mr. Banks had returned. He had been sent upon an embassy

of great importance and diplomatic delicacy : no less, indeed, than to prevail upon Mrs. Abraham Freeman to permit her eldest daughter, Tottie, a girl of seventeen, to come to Rainbar during the period of Miss Neuchamp's stay, to attend upon that lady as housemaid, lady's maid, and general attendant. He was empowered to make any reasonable promises to provide the girl with everything she might want, short of a husband, but to bring her up if it could possibly be done. For, of course, Ernest was duly sensible of the extreme awkwardness that would result from the presence of Miss Neuchamp—albeit a near relative—as the sole representative of womanhood at such an essentially bachelor settlement as Rainbar.

Tottie Freeman, who had commenced to bloom in the comparatively desert air of Rainbar, was a damsel not altogether devoid of youthful charms. True, the unfriendly sun, the scorching blasts, together with the culpable disuse of veil or bonnet, had combined to embrown what ought to have been her complexion, and, worse again, to implant such a crop of freckles upon her face, neck, and arms, that she looked as if a bran-bag had been shaken over her naturally fair skin.

Now that we have said the worst of her, it must be admitted that her figure was very good, well developed, upright, and elastic. She could run as fast as any of her brothers, carrying a tolerable weight, and (when no one was looking) vault on her ambling mare, which she could ride with or without a saddle over range or river, logs, scrub, or reed-beds, just as well as they could. She could intimidate a half-wild cow with a roping pole, and milk her afterwards ; drive a team on a pinch, and work all day in the hot sun. With all this there was nothing unfeminine or unpleasing to the eye in the bush maiden. Quite the contrary, indeed. She was a handsome young woman as regards features, form, and carriage. Cool and self-possessed, she was by no means as reckless of speech as many better educated persons of her sex ; and though she liked a little flirtation—'which most every girl expex'—there was not a word to be said to her detriment 'up or down the river,' which comprehended the whole of her social system.

Such was the damsel whom Charley Banks had been despatched to capture by force, fraud, or persuasion for the use and benefit of Miss Augusta Neuchamp. A less suitable ambassador might have been selected. Charley Banks was a very good-looking young fellow, and had always risked a little badinage when brought into contact with Miss Tottie and her family. War had been formally declared between the houses of Neuchamp and Freeman, yet Ernest, as was his custom, had always been unaffectedly polite and kindly to the women of the tribe, young and old.

Therefore Mrs. Freeman had no strong ill-feeling towards him, and Miss Tottie was extremely sorry that they never saw Mr. Neuchamp riding up to the door now, with a pleasant good-

morrow, sometimes chatting for a quarter of an hour, when the old people were out of the way. When Charley Banks first asked Mrs. Freeman to let her daughter go as a great favour to Mr. Neuchamp, and afterwards inflamed Tottie's curiosity by descriptions of the great wealth and high fashion of Miss Neuchamp (who had a dray-load of dresses, straight from London and Paris, coming up next week), he found the fort commencing to show signs of capitulation. At first Mrs. Freeman 'couldn't spare Tottie if it was ever so.' Then Tottie 'couldn't think of going among a parcel of young fellows, and only one lady in the place.' Then Mrs. Freeman 'might be able to manage for a week or two, though what Abe would say when he came home and found his girl gone to Rainbar, she couldn't say.' Then Tottie 'wouldn't mind trying for a week or two.' She supposed 'nobody would run away with her, and it must be awfully lonely for the lady all by herself.' Besides, 'she hadn't seen a soul lately, and was moped to death; perhaps a little change would do her good.' So the 'treaty of Rainbar,' between the high contracting personages, resolved itself into this, that Tottie was to have ten shillings a week for a month's service, if Miss Neuchamp stayed so long, was to obey all her lawful commands, and to make herself 'generally useful.'

'So if you'll be kind enough to run in the mare, Mr. Banks—she's down on the flat there, and not very flash, you may be sure—I'll get my habit on, and mother will send up my things with Billy in the evening. Here's my bridle.'

Having stated the case thus briefly, Miss Freeman retired into a remarkably small bedroom which she shared with two younger sisters and a baby-brother, to make the requisite change of raiment, while Charley Banks ran into the stockyard and caught the varmint, ambling black mare, which he knew very well by sight. As he led her up to the hut Miss Tottie came out, carrying her saddle in one hand and holding up her alpaca habit with the other. She promptly placed it upon the black mare's back, buckled the girths, and touching the stirrup with her foot, gave a spring which seated her firmly in the saddle, and the black mare dashed off at an amble which was considerably faster than a medium trot.

'What a brute that mare of yours is to amble, Tottie,' said Mr. Banks, slightly out of breath; 'can't you make her go a more Christian pace? Come, let's have a spin.'

'All right,' said the girl, going off at speed, and sitting down to her work, 'but it must be a very short one; my mare is as weak as a cat, and I suppose your horse isn't much better.'

'He's as strong as nothing to eat three times a day can make him. So pull up as soon as you like. I say, Tottie, I'm awfully glad you've come up this time to help us with our lady. It was first-rate of your mother to let you come. Fancy Miss Neuchamp coming up in the coach by herself from Sydney!'

'Why shouldn't she? I wish I had the chance of going down

by myself—wouldn't I take it—quick? But I say, Mr. Banks, what am I to do when I get there? I shall be so frightened of the lady. And I never was in service before.'

'Oh, you must take it easy, you know,' commenced Mr. Banks, in a very clear explanation-to-a-child sort of way. 'Do everything she tells you, always say "Yes, ma'am," and "No, ma'am," and be a good girl all round. I've seen you *look* awfully good sometimes, Tottie, you know.'

'Oh, nonsense, Mr. Banks,' said the nut-brown maid, blushing through her southern-tinted skin in a very visible manner. 'I'm no more than others, I expect. What shall I have to do, though?'

'Well, a good deal of nothing, I should say. You'll sleep in the room I used to have, next to hers; for you'll be in the cottage all by yourselves all night. You'll have to sweep and dust, and wash for Miss Neuchamp, and wait at table. The rest of the time you'll have to hang it out the best way you can. You mustn't quarrel with old Johnny, the cook, or else he'll go away and leave us all in the bush. He's a cross old ruffian, but he *can* cook.'

'I wonder if it will be very dull—but it won't be for long, will it, Mr. Banks?'

'Dull? don't think of it. Won't there be me and Jack Windsor, and an odd traveller to talk to. Besides, Jack's a great admirer of yours, isn't he, Tottie?'

'Not he,' quoth the damsel, with decision; 'there's some girl down the country that he thinks no end of; besides, father and he don't get on well,' added Miss Tottie, with much demureness.

'Oh, that don't signify,' said Mr. Banks authoritatively. 'Jack's a good fellow, and will be overseer here some day; you go in and cut down the other girl. He said you were the best-looking girl on the river last Sunday.'

'Oh, you go on,' said Tottie, playing with the bridle rein, and again making her mare run up to the top of her exceptional pace, so that further playful conversation by Mr. Banks was restricted by his lack of breath.

As they approached the Rainbar homestead Tottie slackened this aggravating pace (which resembles what Americans call 'racking or pacing'—it is natural to many Australian horses, though of course capable of development by education) and in a somewhat awe-stricken tone inquired, 'Is she a *very* grand lady, indeed, Mr. Banks?'

'Well, she'll be dressed plainly, of course,' said Charley. 'The dust's enough to spoil anything above a gunnybag after all this dry weather. Her things are coming up, as I told you, but you never saw any one with half the breeding before. You were a little girl when you came here, Tottie; did you ever see a real lady in your life, now?'

'I saw Mrs. Jones, of Yamboola, down the country,' said

Tottie doubtfully. 'Father sent me up one day with some fresh butter.'

'I wish he'd send you up with some now,' said Charley, who hadn't heard of butter or milk for six months. 'Mrs. Jones is pretty well, but think of Miss Neuchamp's pedigree. Her great-grandmother's *great-grandmother* was a grand lady, and lived in a castle, and so on, for five hundred years back, and all the same for nearly a thousand. I saw it all in an old book of Mr. Neuchamp's one day, about the history of their county.'

'Lor!' said Tottie, 'how nice! Why, she must be like the imported filly we saw at Wargan Races last year. Oh, wasn't she a real beauty? such legs! and such a sweet head on her!—I never saw the like of it!'

'You're a regular Currency lass, Tottie,' laughed Mr. Banks; 'always thinking about horses. Don't you tell Miss Neuchamp that she's very sweet about the head and has out-and-out legs: she mightn't understand it. Here we are—jump down. I'll put the mare in the paddock.'

Miss Neuchamp, having had time to finish luncheon, had walked out into the verandah with her cousin, when she was attracted by the trampling of horses, and looked forth in time to see her proposed handmaid sail up to the door at a pace which would have excited observation in Rotten Row.

Mr. Banks awaited her dismounting, knowing full well that she required no assistance. The active maiden swung herself sideways on the saddle and dropped to the ground as lightly as the 'bounding beauty of Bessarabia,' or any ordinary circus sawdust-treading celebrity. Lifting her habit, she advanced to the verandah with a curious mixture of shyness and self-possession. She successfully accomplished the traditional courtesy to Miss Neuchamp, and then shook hands cordially with Ernest, as she had been in the habit of doing. Miss Augusta put up her eyeglass at this, and regarded the 'young person' with a fixed and critical gaze.

'I'm very much obliged to your mother for letting you come, Tottie, and I am very glad to see you at Rainbar,' said Mr. Neuchamp. 'If you go into the dining-room, you will find the lunch on the table; I daresay you will have an appetite after your ride. You can clear it away by and by, and Miss Neuchamp will tell you anything she wishes you to do. You will live in the cottage, and you must help old Johnny as well as you can, without quarrelling with him—you know his temper—or letting him bully you.'

Tottie was about to say, 'I'm not afraid of the old tinker,' but, remembering Mr. Banks's advice, replied meekly, 'Yes, sir; thank you, Mr. Neuchamp,' and retired to her lunch and duties.

'I suppose that is a sample of your peasantry,' said Miss Neuchamp, with cold preciseness of tone. 'Do you generally shake hands with your housemaids in the colonies? I suppose it must be looked for in a democracy.'

'Well, Tottie Freeman isn't exactly a peasant,' explained Ernest mildly. 'We haven't any of the breed here. She is a farmer's daughter, and her proud sire has or had an acreage that would make him a great man at fair and market in England. You will find her a good-tempered, honest girl, not afraid of work, as we say here, and as she is your only possible attendant, you must make the best of her.'

'Is she to join us at table?' inquired Miss Neuchamp, with the same fixed air of indifference. 'Of course I only ask for information.'

'She will fare as we do, but will take her refection after we have completed ours. She cannot very well be sent to the kitchen.'

'Why not?' demanded Miss Augusta.

'For reasons which will be apparent to you, my dear Augusta, after your longer stay in Australia. But principally because there are only men there at present, and our old cook is not a suitable companion for a young girl.'

'Very peculiar household arrangements,' said Miss Neuchamp, 'but I suppose I shall comprehend in time.'

CHAPTER XXV

HAVING communicated this sentiment in a tone which did not conduce to the lighter graces of conversation, Miss Neuchamp resumed her reading. Silence, the ominous oppressive silence of those who do not wish to speak, reigned unbroken for a while.

At length, lifting her head as if the thought had suddenly struck her, she said, 'I cannot think why you did not buy a station nearer to town, where you might have lived in a comparatively civilised way.'

'For the very sufficient reasons that there is never so much money to be made at comfortable, highly improved stations, and the areas of land are invariably smaller.'

'Then you have come to regard money as everything? Is this the end of the burning philanthropy, and all that sort of thing?'

'You are too quick in your conclusions, my dear Augusta,' replied Mr. Neuchamp, somewhat hurt. 'It is necessary, I find, to make some money to ensure the needful independence of position without which philanthropical or other projects can scarcely be carried out.'

'I daresay you will end in becoming a mere colonist, and marrying a colonial girl, after all your fine ideas. I suppose there are some a shade more refined than this one.'

Mr. Neuchamp stood aghast—words failed him. Augusta went on quietly reading her book. She failed to perceive the avalanche which was gathering above her head.

'My dear Augusta,' he said at length, with studied calmness, 'it is time that some of your misconceptions should be cleared away. Let me recall to you that you were only a few days in a hotel in Sydney before you started on your journey to this distant and comparatively rude district. If you had acted reasonably, and remained in Sydney to take advantage of introductions to my friends, you would have had some means of making comparisons after seeing Australian ladies. But with your present total ignorance of the premises, I wonder that a well-educated woman should be so illogical as to state a conclusion.'

'Well, perhaps I am a little premature,' conceded Miss Augusta, whose temper was much under command. 'I suppose there is a wonderful young lady at the back of all this indignation. Mr. Croker said as much. I must wait and make her acquaintance. I wish you all sorts of happiness, Ernest. Now I must go and look after the *other* young lady.'

When Miss Neuchamp returned to the dining-room she perceived that the damsel whose social status was so difficult to define had finished her mid-day meal, and had also completed the clearing off and washing up of the various articles of the service. She had discovered for herself the small room used as a pantry, had ferreted out the requisite cloths and towels, and procured hot water from the irascible Johnny. She had extemporised a table in the passage, and was just placing the last of the articles on their allotted shelves with much deftness and celerity, when Miss Neuchamp entered. Her riding-skirt lay on a chair, and she had donned a neat print frock, which she had brought strapped to the saddle.

'I was coming to give you instructions,' said Miss Neuchamp, 'but I see you have anticipated me by doing everything which I should have asked you to do, and very nicely too. What is your name?'

'Mary Anne Freeman,' said Tottie demurely.

'I thought I heard Mr. Neuchamp address you by some other Christian name,' said Miss Neuchamp, with slight severity of aspect.

'Oh, Tottie,' said the girl carelessly; 'every one calls me Tottie, or Tot; suppose it's for shortness.'

'I shall call you Mary Anne,' said Miss Neuchamp with quiet decision; 'and now, Mary Anne, are you accustomed to the use of the needle? do you like sewing?'

'Well, I don't *like* it,' she replied ingenuously, 'but of course I can sew a little; we have to make our own frocks and the children's things at home.'

'Very proper and necessary,' affirmed Augusta; 'if we can get the material I will superintend your making a couple of dresses for yourself, which perhaps you will think an improvement in pattern on the one you wear.'

'Oh, I should so like to have a new pattern,' said Tottie, with feminine satisfaction. 'There's plenty of nice prints in the store; I'll speak to Mr. Banks about it, mem.'

'I will arrange that part of it,' said Miss Neuchamp. 'In the meanwhile I'll point out your bedroom, which you can put in order as well as mine for the night.'

After the first day or two Miss Neuchamp, though occasionally shocked at the Australian girl's ignorance of that portion of the Church Catechism which exhorts people to behave 'lowly and reverently to all their betters,' was pleased with the intelligence and artless good-humour of her attendant. She was sufficiently acute to discriminate between the genuine respect

which the girl exhibited to her, 'a real lady,' and the mere lip service and servility too often yielded by the English poor, from direct compulsion of grinding poverty and sore need. She discovered that Tottie was quick and teachable in the matter of needlework, so that, having been stimulated by the alluring expectation of 'patterns,' she worked readily and creditably.

For a few days Miss Neuchamp managed to employ and interest herself not altogether unpleasantly. Ernest, of course, betook himself off to some manner of station work immediately after breakfast, returning, if possible, to lunch. This interval Miss Neuchamp filled up in great measure by means of her correspondence, which was voluminous and various of direction, ranging from her Aunt Ermengarde, a conscientious but ruthless conservative, to philosophical acquaintances whom she had met in her travels, and who, like her, had much ado to fill up those leisure hours of which their lives were chiefly composed. This portion of the day also witnessed Tottie's most arduous labours, to which she addressed herself with great zeal and got through her work, as she termed it, so as to attire herself becomingly and wait at table.

In the afternoon Ernest went out for walking excursions to such points of interest, neither many nor picturesque, as the neighbourhood supplied. There was a certain 'bend' or curving reach of the river where from a lofty bluff, the red walls of which the rushing tide had channelled for ages, a striking and uncommon view was obtained. The vast plain, here diversified by the giant eucalypti which fringed the winding watercourse, stretched limitless to the horizon. But all was apparently barren from Dan to Beersheba. The reed-beds were trampled and eaten down to the last cane. The soft rich alluvium in which they grew was cracked, yet hard as a brickfield. How different from the swaying emerald billows with feathered tasselled crests which other summers had seen there! Something of this sort had Ernest endeavoured to explain to Miss Neuchamp when she spoke disrespectfully of the trodden cloddy waste, contrasting it scornfully with the velvet meads which bordered English rivers. But Augusta, defective in imagination, never believed in anything she did not see. Therefore a reed-bed appeared to her mental vision till the day of her death always as a species of abnormal dismal swamp, lacking the traditional element of moisture.

Other explorations were made in the cool hours of the evening, but gradually Miss Neuchamp tired of the monotonous aspect of matters. The dusty tracks were not pleasant to her feet. The mosquitoes assailed her with savage virulence, whether she walked at sunrise, mid-day, or darkening eve. If she sat down on the river bank and watched the shallow but still pure and gleaming waters, ants of every conceivable degree of curiosity or ferocity discomposed her. There was no

rest, no variety, no beauty, no 'proper' wood, valley, mountain, or brook. She could not imagine human beings living constantly in such a hateful wilderness. If Ernest had not all his life, and now most of all, developed a talent for useless and incomprehensible self-sacrifice, he would abandon such a spot for ever.

Mr. Neuchamp felt himself pressed to his last entrenchments to defend his position; Fate seemed to have arrived personally, masked, not for the first time in man's strange story, in the guise of a woman. That woman, too, his persistent, inexorable cousin Augusta. 'The stars in their courses fought against Sisera.' The heavens, dead to the dumb, imploring looks of the great armies of perishing brutes, to the prayers of ruined men; the earth, with withered herb and drying streamlet gasping and faint, breathless, under the burning noon and the pitiless dry moon rays,—alike conspired against him!

And now his cousin, who with all her faults and defects was stanchly devoted to her kindred and what she believed to be their welfare, came here to madden him with recollections of the wonderland of his birth, and to fill him with ignoble longings to purchase present relief by the ruinous sacrifice of purpose and principle.

'I don't know,' he said, at the end of a closely contested argument, 'whether all women are incapable of comprehending the adherence to a fixed purpose, to the unquestioned end and climax. But you must forgive me, my dear Augusta, for saying that you appear to me to be in the position of a passenger who urges the captain of a vessel to alter his course because the gale is wild and the waves rough. Suppose you had made a suggestion to the captain of the *Rohilla*, in which noble steamer you made your memorable voyage to these hapless isles. The officers of the great company are polished gentlemen as well as seamen of the first order, but I am afraid Gordon Anderson would have been more curt than explanatory on *that* occasion.'

'And you are like the man in Sinbad the Sailor, as you like marine similes,' retorted Augusta; 'you will see your vessel gradually drawn toward the loadstone island till all the nails and rivets fly out by attraction of ruin, and you will sink in the waters of oblivion, unhonoured and unsung.'

'But not "unloved," I trust,' rejoined Ernest; 'don't think that matters, even in Australia, will be quite so bad as that. By the way, let me congratulate you upon your facility of quotation. Your memory must have improved amazingly of late.'

This unfair taunt closed the conversation abruptly. But like some squabbles between very near and dear friends, there was a tacit agreement not to refer to it. Subsequently all went on as usual.

Miss Neuchamp was a very fair horsewoman, having hunted

without coming very signally to grief, by dint of a wonderfully broken hunter, who was first cousin to a rocking-horse—after this wise: he would on no account run away; he was easy, he was safe; you could not throw him down over any species of leap—hedge, ditch, brook, or bulfinch. It was all alike to Negotiator. After a couple of seasons and the aid of this accomplished palfrey, Miss Neuchamp, with some reason, came to the conclusion that she could ride fairly well. So, having broached the idea at breakfast one morning, Ernest joyfully suggested Osmund as the type of ease and elegance, and of such a nerve that an organ and monkey might, were the consideration sufficient, be placed on his short back to-morrow without risk of casualty.

Miss Neuchamp thought that she should like to ride down and visit the Freeman encampment, when Tottie, who would of course attend her, might have the opportunity of seeing her mother and other kinsfolk.

The side-saddle was the next difficulty; but Tottie proffered hers at once, saying that she could ride in a man's saddle, which she could borrow from Mr. Banks.

'But you cannot ride in a man's saddle, Mary Anne; at any rate with me,' said Miss Neuchamp decisively, while a maidenly blush overspread her features.

'Why not?' inquired Tottie, with much surprise. 'I can ride in one just as well as the other. You have only to throw the off-side stirrup over the pommel, sit square and straight, and there you are. You didn't think I was going to ride boy-fashion, did you?'

'I was not sure,' conceded Miss Neuchamp. 'However, your explanation has satisfied me. If you like, we will ride down to your father's place this afternoon.'

So Osmund being brought round, and Tottie's side-saddle upon him placed, that temperate charger walked off with Miss Neuchamp as if he had carried a 'pretty horsebreaker' up Rotten Row before the eyes of an envious aristocracy, while Tottie disposed herself upon a station saddle and ambled off so erect and free of seat that few could have known that she was crutchless and self-balanced. Mr. Windsor followed at a respectful distance, in case of any *contretemps* requiring a groom's assistance.

Miss Neuchamp was perhaps never more favourably impressed with the South Land, in which she was sojourning, than when she felt herself borne along by Osmund, a hackney of rare excellence—free, elastic, safe, fast, easy! How many horses of whom so much can be said does one come across in a lifetime?

'This seems to be an exceedingly nice horse of my cousin's,' said she to Tottie. 'I had no idea that such riding horses could be found in the interior. He must have been very carefully trained.'

'He's a plum, that's what he is!' affirmed Tottie with decision. 'He's the best horse in these parts, by long chalks. Mr. Neuchamp let me have a spirt on him one day. My word! didn't I put him along?'

'I am surprised that he should have let you ride him,' replied Miss Neuchamp with dignity; 'but my cousin is very eccentric, and does not, in my opinion, always keep his proper position.'

'I don't know about his proper position,' said Tottie with great spirit, 'but before our people had the row with him—and that was Uncle Joe's fault—there was no one within fifty mile of Rainbar that wouldn't have gone on their knees to serve Mr. Neuchamp. *As a gentleman, he can't be beat*; and many a one besides me thinks that.'

'Oh well, if you have that sort of respectful feeling towards my cousin, Mary Anne, I have nothing to say,' said Miss Augusta. 'No one can possibly have better intentions, and I am glad to see them so well appreciated, even in the bush. Suppose we canter.'

She drew the curb rein as she spoke, and Osmund sailed off at a long, bounding, deerlike canter over the smooth dusty track, which convinced Miss Neuchamp that she had not left all the good horses in England. The scant provender had impaired his personal appearance, but had not deprived him of that courage which he would retain as long as he possessed strength to stand on his legs.

'I have not enjoyed a ride like this for many a day,' she said with unusual heartiness. 'This is a very comfortable saddle of yours, though I miss the third pommel. How do you manage, Mary Anne, to ride so squarely and easily upon that uncomfortable saddle?'

'I've ridden many a mile without a saddle at all—that is, with nothing but an old gunny-bag to sit on,' said Tottie, 'and jumped over logs too. Of course I was a kid then.'

'A what?' said Miss Neuchamp anxiously.

'Oh, a little child,' explained Tottie. 'I often used to go out at daylight to fetch in the cows and the working bullocks when we lived down the country. Bitter cold it was, too, in the winter; such hard frosts.'

'Frosts?' asked Miss Augusta. 'Do you ever have frosts? Why, I supposed they were unknown here.'

'You don't suppose the whole country is like this, miss?' said Tottie. 'Why, near the mountains there's snow and ice, and it rains every winter, and the floods are enough to drown you.'

'Are there floods too? It does not look as if they could ever come.'

'Do you see that hut, miss? That's our place. I heard Piambook, the black boy, tell father it would be swep' away some day. Father laughed at him.'

Here they arrived at the abode of Freeman *père*, at which Miss Neuchamp gazed with much curiosity.

In the language of architecture, the construction had been but little decorated. A plain and roughly-built abode, composed of round saplings nailed vertically to the wall-plate, and plastered insufficiently with mud. The roof was thatched with reeds, put on in a very ineffectual and chance-medley manner. The hut or cottage contained two large and three small rooms. There was no garden whatever, or any attempt at the cultivation of the baked and hopeless-looking clay soil. Close to the side of the house was a stockyard, comprising the 'gallows' of the colonists, a rough, rude contrivance consisting of two up-rights and a crosspiece for elevating slaughtered cattle. Upon this structure was at present hanging the carcass of a fine six-months-old calf. No other enclosure was visible, the only attempt at the preservation of neatness being the sweeping of the earth immediately around the front and back doors.

Tottie immediately clattered up to the hut door, the black mare putting her head so far in that she obstructed the egress of a middle-aged woman, who made haste to come forth and receive the guests.

'Mother,' said the girl, 'here's Miss Neuchamp come to see you ; bring a chair for her to get off by.'

This article of furniture having been supplied, Augusta was fain to descend upon it with as much dignity as she could manage, not being confident of her ability to drop down, like the agile Tottie, from a tallish horse, as was Osmund. Tottie, having given the horses in charge of a small brown-faced brother, who spent his whole time in considering Osmund, and apparently learning him by heart, welcomed Miss Neuchamp into her home. That young lady found herself for the first time under the roof of an Australian free-selector, and felt that she had acquired a new experience.

'Come in, miss ; I'm very glad to see you, I'm sure ; please to sit down,' was the salutation Augusta received, in tones that spoke a hearty welcome, in very pure unaccented English.

Miss Neuchamp selected the most 'reliable' looking of the wooden-seated American chairs, and depositing herself thereon, looked around. The dwelling was, she thought, more prepossessing than the outside had led her to imagine. Though everything was plain to ugliness, there was yet nothing squalid or repulsive. All things were very clean. The room in which they sat was evidently only used as a parlour or 'living room.' It was fairly large and commodious. The earthen floor was hard, even, and well swept. A large table occupied the centre. The fireplace was wide and capacious, the mantelpiece so high that it was not easy to reach. There was a wooden sofa covered with faded chintz, and an American clock. Half a dozen cheap chairs, a shelf well filled with indifferently bound books, a few unframed woodcuts hung upon the walls, made up

the furniture and ornamentation. Opening from this apartment laterally was evidently a bedroom. At the back a skilling, a lower roofed portion of the building, contained several smaller rooms. A detached two-roomed building, in what would have been the back-yard had any enclosure been made, was probably the kitchen and laundry.

Mrs. Freeman insisted upon putting down the kettle to boil, in order that she might make a cup of tea for her distinguished visitor, evidently under the opinion that every one naturally desired to drink tea whenever they could get it.

'And how have you been behaving yourself, Tottie?' said she, addressing her daughter, as a convenient mode of opening the conversation. 'I hope and trust you've been a help to Miss Neuchamp. Has she, miss?'

'Oh, certainly,' answered Augusta; 'Mary Anne has been a very good girl indeed. I don't know how I should get on without her. And I have borrowed her side-saddle too. How long will it be before Mr. Freeman comes home?'

'Oh, he won't be home much before dark. He's always out on the run all day long. He hates coming in before the day is done.'

'Why is that, Mrs. Freeman?'

"'Because," he says, "what can a man do after his day's work but sit down and twirl his thumbs." He haven't got any garden here to fiddle about in, and he can't sit still and smoke, like some people.'

'But why don't you have a garden?' promptly inquired Augusta. 'I suppose there's no reason why you shouldn't have one?'

'You see, miss,' said Mrs. Freeman, casting about for a mode of explaining to her young lady visitor that she didn't know what she was talking about, 'the ground ain't very good just here; and though it's so dry and baked just now, they say the floods come all over it; and perhaps we mightn't be here altogether that long. And Freeman, he's had a deal of trouble with the stock lately. I don't say but what a garden would look pretty enough; but who's to work in it? It ain't like our place down the country. There we had a garden—lots of peaches and grapes, and more plums, apples, and quinces than we could use and give away, besides early potatoes and all kinds of vegetables.'

'I suppose you regretted leaving such a home,' said Miss Neuchamp, rather impressed by the hothouse profusion of the fruits mentioned.

'Well, I'd rather live there on a pound a week,' said Mrs. Freeman, 'than here on riches. Freeman thought the stock would make up for all, but I didn't, and I'm always sorry for the day we ever left the old farm.'

As the good woman spoke the tears stood in her eyes, and Miss Neuchamp much marvelled that any spot in the desolate

region of Australia should have power to attract the affection even of hard-worked, unrelieved Mrs. Freeman.

'Mother's always fretting about that old place at Bowning,' said Tottie. 'I don't believe it was any great things either. It was a deal colder than this, and we had lots of milk and butter always; but bread and butter's not worth caring about.'

'You don't recollect it, Tottie,' said her mother, 'or you would not talk in that way. Don't you remember going into the garden to pick the peaches? How cool and shady it was in the mornings, to be sure, without scores of mosquitoes to sting and eat us up! Then there was always grass enough for the cows, and we had plenty of milk and butter and cheese, except, perhaps, in the dead of winter. It was better for all of us in other ways too, and that's more.'

'I don't see that, mother,' said Tottie.

'But I do,' said Mrs. Freeman, 'and more than me knows it. There's your father isn't the same man, without his regular work at the farm, and the carrying and the other jobs, that used to fill up his time from daylight to dark. Now he's nothing but the cattle to look after; and such weather as this there's nothing to do from month's end to month's end, unless to pull them out of the waterholes. And I *know* he had a "burst" at that wretched Stockman's Arms the last time he was down the river. He that was that sober before you could not tell him from a Son of Temperance.'

'I feel sorry that you should have so much reason to complain of your lot,' said Miss Neuchamp. 'The poor, I am aware, are never contented, at least none that I ever saw in England. Yet it seems a pity, indeed, that want of patience and trust in Providence should have led to your moving to this unsuitable and, I am afraid, ill-fated locality.'

'We're not altogether so poor, miss,' said the worthy matron, recovering herself. 'Abe will have over five hundred pounds in the bank when he's delivered up the land and the stock to this Mr. Levison, that's bought us all out. But what's a little money, one way or the other, if your life's miserable, and your husband takes to idle ways and worse, and your children grow up duffers and planters, and perhaps end in sticking up people?'

'Oh, mother, shut up!' ejaculated Tottie, with more kindness in her tone than the words would have indicated. 'Things won't be as bad as that. Don't I teach Poll and Sally and Ned and Billy? Besides, what does Miss Neuchamp know about duffing and sticking up? We'll be all right when we clear out next year, and you can go back to Bowning and buy Book's farm, and set father splitting stringy-bark rails for the rest of his life, if that's what keeps him good. I expect the tea is ready. Won't you give Miss Neuchamp a cup?'

Mrs. Freeman made haste to fill up a cup of tea, and a small jug of milk being produced, Miss Augusta found herself in possession

of the best cup of tea she had tasted at Rainbar. She felt a sincere compassion for her hostess as a woman of properly submissive turn of mind, who had sense enough to regret her improper and irreligious departure from the lowly state in which Providence had placed her.

Promising to call again, and comforting the low-spirited matron as far as in her lay, she remounted Osmund with some difficulty by means of the chair, and rode homewards, followed by Mr. Windsor, who had solaced his leisure by extracting from the younger girls, whom he had descried fishing, the latest news of the cattle operations of the family generally.

'Your mother seems to be very much of my opinion, Mary Anne,' said Miss Augusta as soon as they were fairly on the sandy home-station track, 'that this is a most undesirable place to live in.'

'Mother's as good a woman as ever was,' said Tottie, 'but she don't "savey." She's always fretting about our old farm; and it certainly was cooler—that's about all the pull there was in it. Father's made more money here in two or three years than he'd have got together in twenty there. I should have been hoeing corn all day with a pair of thick boots on, and grown up as wild as a scrub filly. I don't want to go back.'

'Your mother seems a person of excellent sense, Mary Anne, and I must say that I *fully agree with her*,' said Miss Neuchamp, with her most unbending expression, designed to modify her attendant's lightness of tone. 'Depend upon it, unhappiness and misfortune invariably follow the attempt to quit an allotted station in life.'

'Oh, that be hanged for a yarn! Oh, I beg your pardon, miss,' said Tottie confusedly, for she was on the point of relapsing into the Rainbar vernacular. 'But surely every one ain't bound to stop where they're planted, good soil or bad, water or no water, like a corn-seed in a cow track or a pumpkin in a tree stump! Men and women have it in 'em to forage about a bit, else how do some people get on so wonderfully. I've read about self-help, and all that, and heaps of people beginning with half-a-crown and making fortunes. Ought they to have thrown the half-crown away or the fortune after they had made it?'

'No doubt some people are apparently favoured,' said Miss Augusta, regarding Tottie's argument as another result of the over-education of 'these sort of persons.' 'In the end it is often the worst thing that can befall them. Now let us canter.'

When Augusta Neuchamp had remained for a fortnight at Rainbar she began to perceive that the monotonous existence likely to be unreasonably prolonged would serve no object either of pleasure or profit. No amount of residence would teach her an iota more of the nature of such an establishment as Rainbar than she knew already. What was there to learn? The plains within sight of the cottage needed but to be indefinitely multiplied; and what then? An area of country

equally arid, barren, unspeakably desolate. Other droves and herds of cattle equally emaciated. Nothing possibly could be in her eyes more hopeless and horrible than these endless death-stricken, famine-haunted wastes. Why did Ernest stay here? She had tried her utmost to induce him to abandon the whole miserable delusion, quoting the arguments of Mr. Jermyn Croker until he spoke angrily about that gentleman and closed the debate.

The obvious thing to do was to return to Sydney, but even this comparatively simple step was difficult to carry out. Miss Neuchamp did not desire again to tempt the perils of the road unattended. She had taken it for granted that Ernest, the most complying and good-natured of men ordinarily, would return to Sydney with her; and she had trusted to the influence of civilisation and her steady persuasion to prevail upon him to return to England to his friends, and to what she deemed to be his fixed and unalterable position in life.

On this occasion she met with unexpected opposition. Ernest positively declined to quit his station at present.

'My dear Augusta,' said he, 'you do not know what you are asking. I have a number of very important duties to perform here. My financial state is an extremely critical one. I cannot with any decency appear in Sydney when everything points to the ruin of myself and my whole order. I am sincerely sorry that you should feel life here to be so extremely *ennuyant*, but I should never, if consulted, have advised you to come; and now I am afraid you must wait until a proper escort turns up or until I can accompany you.'

'And when will that be?'

'When the rain comes, certainly not before.'

Miss Augusta said that this last contingency was as probable as the near advent of the millennium. She would wait a given time, and, that expired, would go down to Sydney as she had come up by herself.

A fortnight, even three weeks, passed away. Augusta had mentioned a month as the outside limit of her forbearance. She read over and over 'Mariana in the Moated Grange' and 'Mariana in the South' with quite a new appreciation of their peculiar accuracy as well as poetic sentiment.

Daily she worked and read, and walked and rode, and alternately was hopeful or otherwise about the ultimate conversion of Tottie to the true faith of proper English village lowliness and reverence. Daily Ernest went forth 'out on the run' immediately after breakfast, reappearing only at or after sunset. Insensibly Miss Neuchamp became alarmed to find creeping over her a kind of provincial interest in the affairs of the 'burghers of this desert city.' She listened almost with excitement to the account of a lot of the new cattle having been followed twenty miles over the boundary and recovered by Charley Banks. She heard of a bushranger being captured

about fifty miles off—this was Jack Windsor's story; of the mail coming in twelve hours late in consequence of the horses being exhausted. Ernest gathered this from the overseer of the last lot of travelling sheep that passed through, having been locked up in Wargan Gaol for disobeying a summons. 'Such a handsome young fellow, miss.' This was Tottie's contribution.

What with the reading, the sewing, the teaching of Tottie, the daily cousinly walks and talks, the hitherto uncompromising Augusta became partially converted to station life, and finally admitted in conversation with Ernest that, other things being equal, she *could* imagine a woman enduring such privation for a few years, always assuming that she had the companionship of the one man to whom alone she could freely devote every waking thought, every pulsation of the heart.

'Do you think there's any man born, miss,' inquired Tottie, who was laying the cloth for dinner, but who stopped deliberately and listened with qualified approval to the sentence with which Miss Neuchamp concluded her statement—'any man born—except in a book—like that? I don't. They most of 'em seem to me to take it very easy, smoking and riding about, and drinking at odd times. It's the women that all the real pull comes on.'

'I was not addressing myself to you, Mary Anne,' replied Miss Augusta with dignity; 'I was speaking to Mr. Neuchamp only. I should hardly think your experience entitled you to offer an opinion.'

'H—m,' said Tottie, proceeding with the plates. 'I'm young, and I suppose I don't know much. But I hear what's going on. Don't you think I'd better go down to Sydney, to take care of you on the road, miss, in case there's a Chinaman to knock over? I think I could do that, if I was drove to it.'

On the next day an unusual occurrence took place in that land where events and novelties seemed to have perished like the grass, under the slow calcining of the deadly season—a dray arrived from town.

Miss Neuchamp, in her sore need of change and occupation, could have cheerfully witnessed the unpacking of ordinary station stores, in which, as usual, a little drapery would be comprised. But here again disappointment. It was merely a load of flour.

Depressed and discouraged, Miss Neuchamp had condescended to watch the unloading of the unromantic freight, deriving a faint interest in noting with what apparent ease Jack Windsor and Charley Banks placed the heavy bags upon their shoulders and deposited them in the store.

Rarely was Miss Augusta so lowered in spirit as not to be able to talk. On this occasion she had informed Tottie, with some relish, that English country girls were much ruddier and more healthy looking, as well as, she doubted not, stronger and

more capable of endurance, than those born in Australia could possibly be.

‘Why so?’ inquired Tottie with animation.

‘Why?’ said Miss Neuchamp with asperity; ‘because of the cool, beautiful climate they live in, the regular, wholesome labour they are born to, the superiority of the whole land and people to this dull, deceitful country, all sand and sun-glare.’

‘Well, I can’t say, miss,’ replied Tottie, plotting a surprise, with characteristic coolness, ‘about English girls’ looks, because I’ve hardly ever seen any; but as for health, I’ve a middling appetite, I never was a day ill since I was born, and as to being strong—look here.’

Before the horrified Augusta could forbid her rapid motion, she bounded over to the dray, from which Mr. Windsor had just borne his two hundred pounds of farina. She placed her back beneath the lessening load, and stretching her arms upward in the way proper to grasp the tied corner of the bag, said imperiously, ‘Here, Mr. Carrier, just you lower that bag steady; I want to show the English lady what a Currency girl can walk away with.’

The tall sunburned driver entered into the joke, and winking at Charley Banks, who stood by laughing, he placed the heavy bag fairly and square upon Tottie’s plump shoulders. Miss Neuchamp’s gaze was riveted upon the erratic ‘help’ as if she had been about to commit suicide.

‘Oh! don’t—don’t,’ she gasped; ‘are you mad, Mary Anne? You will break your back, or cripple yourself for life. Mr. Banks, pray interfere! I am sure my cousin will be angry—pray stop her!’

Charley Banks was not afraid that anything dreadful would happen. He had seen the bush girls perform feats of strength and activity ere now which proved to him that very little cause for apprehension existed in the present case.

And there was not much time. For one moment the girl stood, with her arms raised above her head, her figure, in its natural and classic grace, proving the unspeakable advantage of the free, open-air life, with fullest liberty for varied exercise, which she had had from her birth. The next she had moved forward with firm, elastic tread, under a load which a city man out of training would have found no joke, and, walking into the store, permitted it to fall accurately beside the others which had been shot from the backs of Jack Windsor and Mr. Banks into their appointed corner.

There was a slight cheer, and an exclamation of, ‘Well done, Tottie,’ as she returned with a heightened colour and half-triumphant, half-confused air to Miss Neuchamp, who, relieved at her safe return from the dangerous feat, did not administer so severe a rebuke as might have been expected.

‘You may be thankful, Mary Anne, if you do not hereafter discover that this day’s folly has laid the foundation of lifelong

ill-health. But come into the house, child. You *have* some colour for once. Let me see no more pranks of this sort again, while I am here.'

'Lor, miss,' said Tottie, 'that's not the first bag of flour I've carried. And father says there was a girl he knew at the Hawkesbury that took one—and *him a-top of it*—around her father's barn. He was only a boy then.'

'I think you may lay the tea, Mary Anne,' said Miss Neuchamp, not requiring any more Hawkesbury anecdotes. 'I feel unusually fatigued to-day.'

Fortunately for all parties, before the extreme limit of Miss Neuchamp's patience and the resources of Rainbar had been reached, a welcome auxiliary arrived in the person of Mr. Middleton. That worthy paterfamilias had been compelled to visit his outlying stations, in order to ascertain the precise amount of death and destruction that was taking place, and was returning to his usual residence nearer the settled districts. He travelled in a light buggy with one horse, being thus enabled to carry a supply of forage, and even water, with him. This, the only known plan for crossing 'dry country' in a bad season, and at the same time maintaining a horse in tolerable condition, was not ornamental in detail. The buggy, with two bags of chaff secured behind, a bushel of maize in front, and a large water bag and bucket swung from the axle, had a striking and unusual effect. But the active, upstanding roadster was in better condition than any horse which had passed Rainbar for many a day, and Mr. Neuchamp at once saw his way to a transfer of responsibility, as far as Miss Augusta was concerned.

'Well, Neuchamp, what do you think of Australia now?' said the old gentleman, in a jolly voice, as, sunburned and dusty, with a great straw hat, a curtain and a net veil, a canvas hood to his buggy, and the fodder previously referred to picturesquely disposed about his travelling carriage, he drove up to the verandah, causing Augusta to put up her eyeglass with amazement. 'Made any striking alterations for our good? Wish you'd try your hand at the weather, if that's in your line.'

'Come in, and we'll talk it over,' replied Ernest. 'I'm charmed to see you in any kind of weather. Permit me to present you to my cousin, Miss Neuchamp, who doesn't approve of your country at all. I must inform you, Augusta, this is Mr. Middleton, my fellow-passenger, whom you have heard me mention. I hope the ladies are all well.'

'Pretty well when they wrote last; but, like all ladies, I fancy, they are terribly tired of the present state of the season—and no wonder. I can only recollect one worse drought during the thirty years I have been out here.'

'Worse!' ejaculated Augusta. 'I should have thought that impossible. How did you contrive to exist?'

'We *did* manage to keep alive, as I am here to testify.'

laughed the old gentleman, whose proportions were upon an ample and generous scale; 'but of course it was a serious matter in every aspect. However, we weathered that famine, and we shall get over this, with patience and God's blessing.'

That evening it was definitely arranged that Mr. Middleton should give Miss Neuchamp a seat in his encumbered but not overladen buggy as far as his own home station, which he trusted to reach in a week; after which he would undertake, when she was tired of Mrs. Middleton and the girls, to deposit her safely in Sydney.

This was an unlooked-for piece of good fortune. Ernest was much relieved in mind at being freed from the dilemma of returning Augusta as a kind of captive princess of Rainbar, or undertaking an expensive and inopportune journey for the sole purpose of accompanying her to a place which she never should have quitted.

Mr. Middleton, confident of securing provender, now that he had commenced to approach the confines of civilisation, was not sorry to be provided with a young lady companion, having had of late much of his own unrelieved society; and Augusta was more pleased than she cared to show at the prospect of escape from this Sahara existence, without the prestige of the desert or the novelty of Arabs. That night her portmanteau was packed, Tottie coming in for the reversion of as much raiment as constituted her an authority in fashions 'on the river' ever after, and such a *douceur* as confirmed her in Mr. Banks's high estimate of Miss Neuchamp as a 'real lady.'

At six o'clock next morning Augusta Neuchamp bade farewell for ever to the abode of the Australian representative of her ancient house.

'When shall I see you in Sydney, Ernest?' she said, as a last inquiry. 'I daresay they will wish to know at Morahmee.'

'When the rain comes,' said Ernest resolutely. 'Good-bye, Middleton; take great care of her. Remember me to the ladies.' And they were off.

It has been more than once remarked by those of our species who rely for their intellectual recreation less upon action than observation, that great events are apt to be produced by inconsiderable causes. The sighing summer breeze sets free the mountain avalanche. The spark creates the red ruin of a conflagration. The rat in Holland perforates a dam and floods a province.

Mr. Neuchamp sat in his apartment at Rainbar contrasting, doubtfully, his regret at the departure of his cousin with his recovered sense of freedom and independence. True, she was the sole link which in Australia connected him with the thousand spells of home.

But, ever angular in mind, she had proved herself to be so incapable of accommodation to the necessarily altered condi-

tions of a new land, that he had despaired of her acclimatisation. She had even failed to comprehend them.

'This is the result,' he would assert to himself, 'of her deficiency in the faculty of imagination. It may be there are other reasons, but I trace her special failure in *camaraderie* to this neglect of her fairy godmother.'

A person with deficient ideality is necessarily imprisoned by the present. Unable to portray for themselves a presentment of unaccustomed conditions on the mental canvas, such as is traced by Fancy, coloured by Hope, yet corrected by Prudence, they are wholly precluded from the prevision, even in part, of the living wonders, the breathing enchantments, of the future. To them no city of rest, glorious and beautiful, arises from the dull vulgarities of life and endeavour; all with them is of the earth, earthy. A gospel of hard-eyed economy, grudging gain, unrelieved toil, for the poor; for the sordid aspirant, by endless thrift and striving, 'property, property, property; for the rich, a message of selfish enjoyment, grasping monopoly, ungenial ease.

'Such would the world be were the human mind divested of the sublime attributes of Faith and Imagination!' exclaimed Ernest, borne away from his present cares. 'There may be perils for the glad mariner on the sun-bright, flashing wave; but he has the possible glory of descrying purple isles, undiscovered continents. Dying, he falls as a hero; living, he may survive to be hailed as the world's benefactor.'

Much comforted by these bright-hued imaginings and illuminings of the path in which he knew himself to be an ardent traveller, Mr. Neuchamp awaited his mail-bag with more than usual serenity.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE untoward season had not been without its effect upon the thousand and one gardens that paint, in each vivid delicate hue, with flower tracery and plant glory, the rocky steeps and fairy nooks which engirdle Sydney. The undulating lawns were dimmer, the plant masses less profuse, the showery blooms less dazzling, the trailers less gorgeous, than in other years. Yet were not the shores of the fair, wondrous haven, beloved by Ocean for many a long-past æon of lonely joy, before the bold scion of a sea-roving race invaded its giant portals, without some tokens of his favour. In the long, throbbing, burning days, when the sun beat blistering upon the heated roof, the white pavement, the dusty streets, he summoned from beyond the misty blue horizon the rushing wind-sisters fresh from the ice-galleries, the snow-peaks, the frozen colonnades of that lone land where sits enthroned in dazzling splendour, during days that die not or nights that never end, the sorceress of the Southern Pole. From their wings, frost-jewelled, dripped gentlest showers, refreshing the shore, though they passed not the great mountain range which so long guarded the hidden treasure-lands of the central waste. Hot and parched, compared with former seasons, the autumn seemed endless, yet were the gardens and shrubberies of Morahmee so comparatively verdant and fresh, from their proximity to the sea, that Ernest would have hailed it as an Eden of greenest glory, in comparison with the 'sun-scorched desert brown and bare' which Rainbar had long resembled.

Among the inhabitants of Sydney who made daily moan against the slow severity of the hopeless season (and who had in some cases good cause, in diminished incomes and receding trade, for such murmurings), Paul Frankston, to his great surprise, found his daughter to be enrolled.

This occurrence, involving as he thought a radical change of disposition, if not of character, much alarmed the worthy merchant. Calm and resolute, if occasionally variant of mood, Antonia Frankston had hitherto been one of the least querulous of mortals. Sufficiently cultured to comprehend that the

stupendous laws of the universe were not controlled by the fancied woe or weal of feeble man, she had never sympathised with the unmeaning deprecation of climatic occurrences.

'The wind and the weather are in God's hand,' she had once answered to some shallow complainer. 'What are we that we should dare to blame or praise? Besides, I am a sailor's daughter, and at sea they take the weather as it comes.'

In other matters, which could be set right by personal supervision or self-denial, she held it to be most unworthy weakness to make bitter outcry or vain lamentation. 'If the evil can be repaired, why not at once commence the task? If hopeless, then bear it with firmness. Provide against its recurrence, if you like; but, in any case, what possible good can talking or, more correctly, whining do? That is the reason why men so often despise women, so often suffer from them. Look at *them* when anything goes wrong—how hard they work, how little they talk! Perhaps they smoke the more. But even that has the virtue of silence, and therefore of wisdom. Talk is a very good thing in the right place, but when things go wrong, it is *not* in its right place.'

In former days of autumn, when the rains came not, when the flowers drooped, when bad news came from Paul Frankston's pastoral constituents, and that worthy financier was troubled in mind, or smoked more than his proper allowance of cigars over the consideration of the state of trade, it was Antonia who invariably cheered and consoled him. She pointed out the triumphs of the past; she steadfastly counselled trust in the future; she soothed the night with her songs; she cheered the day with unfailing ministration to his comfort and habitudes.

Now, curiously, the old man thought his darling was different from what he had ever recollected. She suffered repinings to escape her as to the weary rainless season. She did not deny or controvert his occasional grumbling assertions, after a hot day in the city, that the whole country was going to the bad. She was, wonder of wonders, occasionally irritable with the servants, and impatient of their shortcomings. She kept her books unchanged and apparently unread for a time unprecedented in Mr. Shaddock's experience.

Mr. Frankston could not by any means comprehend this deflection of his daughter's equable mental constitution. After much consideration he came to the conclusion that she wanted change of air, that the depressing hot season was telling upon her health for the first time in his recollection; and he cast about for an eligible chance to send her to some friends in Tasmania, where the keener air, the somewhat more bracing island climate, might restore her to the animation which he feared she was losing day by day.

He thought also, amid his loving plans and plottings for his daughter's welfare, that possibly she needed the stimulus of

additional society. They had been living quietly at Morahmee of late, and the season of comparative gaiety, which in Sydney generally dates from the birthnight of the Empress of Anglo-Saxondom, had not as yet arrived.

'We want a little rousing up,' thought poor Paul; 'we have had no little dinners lately, no one in the evenings. I have been thinking over this confounded season and these bothering bills till I have forgotten my own darling, but for whose sake the whole country might be swallowed up in Mauna Loa, for all old Paul cares. I shouldn't say that either; but it seems hard that anything should ail the poor darling that care might have prevented. If her mother had lived—ah!' and here Paul fell a-thinking, until the wheels of the dogcart grated against the pavement near the office door.

Thus it so chanced that, towards the end of the week, occurred one of the little dinners for which Morahmee was famous, with a 'whip' of certain musical celebrities of the neighbourhood, and as many ordinary guests as made a successful compromise between 'all music,' which sometimes hath not 'charms' for the masculine breast, and a regulation evening party, which would have been an anachronism.

Among the guests for whom Paul, in his anxiety for a healthful distraction for Antonia, had swept the clubs and the hotels, were Mr. Hardy Baldacre and Jermyn Croker. Squatters were scarce in Sydney beyond previous experience. They were all at home on their stations attending to their stock, except those who were in town attending to their bills. These last were chiefly indisposed to society. They dined at their clubs or hotels after half a day's waiting in the manager's ante-chamber, and felt more inclined for the repose of the smoking-room than for the excitement of the society.

Mr. Hardy Baldacre had managed to come to town, however, without such anxieties of a pecuniary nature as interfered with his amusements. Of these he partook of as full measure of every kind and description as he could procure cheaply. He had early developed a taste for pleasure, controlled only by considerations of caution and economy. Those who knew him well disliked him thoroughly, and with cause. Those who met him occasionally, as did Mr. Neuchamp and Paul Frankston, saw in him a well-dressed, good-looking man, with an affectation of good-humour and liberality by no means without attraction. Paul *had* heard assertions made to his disadvantage, but not having bestowed much thought upon the matter, had not gone the length of excluding him from his invitation list; on this occasion he had been rather glad to fill up his table.

Mr. Jermyn Croker, as usual, had constituted himself an exception to ordinary humanity by remaining at his club during the terrible season which sent the most ardent lovers of the metropolis to their distant duties. In explanation he stated that either the whole country would be ruined or it

would not. He frankly admitted that he inclined to the first belief. If the former state of matters prevailed, what was the use of living in the desert till the last camel died and the last well was choked? No human effort could avert the final simoom, which was evidently on its way to engulf pastoral Australia. Now, here at the club (though the wines were beastly, as usual, and the committee ought to be sacked) there would be a little claret and ice available to the last. He should remain and perish, where, at least, a club waiter could see to your interment.

Such was Mr. Jermyn Croker's faith, openly professed in club and counting-house. But those who knew him averred that he took good care to have one of the best overseers in the country at his head station, whose management he kept up to the mark by weekly letters of so consistently depreciatory a nature that nobody expected *he* would survive the season, whatever the issue to others. 'Died of a bad season and Jermyn Croker' had, indeed, been an epitaph written in advance and forwarded to him by a provincial humorist.

Hartley Selmore had also been found available. He, indeed, could not very well remain away from financial headquarters. So many of his unpaid orders and acceptances, with the ominous superscription 'Refer to drawer,' found their way to bank and office by every mail from the interior, that a residence in the metropolis was vitally necessary. In good sooth, his unflagging energy and great powers of resource, under the presence of constant emergency, were equal to the demand made upon them. With the aid of every device of discount and hypothecation known to the children of finance, he managed to keep afloat. His day's work, neither light nor easy of grasp, once over, the philosophical Hartley enjoyed his dinner, his cigar, his whist or billiards, as genuinely as if he had not a debt in the world, and was always ready for a *petit dîner* if he distrusted not the wine.

This dinner was, as usual, perfect in its way. The cooking at Morahmee was proverbial; the wines were too good for even Jermyn Croker to grumble at—had he done so he would have imperilled his reputation as connoisseur, of which he was careful; the conversation of the guests, at first guarded and unsympathetic, rose into liveliness with the conclusion of the first course, and, simultaneously with the circulation of Paul's unrivalled well-iced vintage, became more adventurous and brilliant.

'Where is our young friend Neuchamp?' inquired Hartley Selmore. 'I haven't seen him for an age.'

'Gone to the bad long ago, hasn't he?' replied Croker, with an air of pleasing certainty.

'Heard he had bought a terribly over-rated place on the Darling,' said Selmore. 'Very sharp practice of Parklands. Too bad of him—too bad, wasn't it, now?'

'Was it as good a bargain as Gammon Downs, Mr. Selmore?' inquired Antonia, with a faint resemblance to former archness that lit up her melancholy features. 'I am afraid there is not much to choose between you hardened pioneers when there is a newly-landed purchaser signalled.'

'Really, Miss Frankston, really!' replied Selmore, with a fine imitation of the chivalrous and disinterested; 'you do some of us injustice. In all this dreadful season, I assure you, the creeks at Gammon Downs are running like English brooks, and the grass is green—absolutely green!'

'Why, what colour should it be, Mr. Selmore—blue or magenta? But you know that I am an Australian, and therefore must have learned in the many conversations which have passed in my hearing about station matters that "green grass country" is generally spoken disrespectfully of, and "permanent water" is not everything. But we will not continue the rather worn subject.'

'I fancy Neuchamp can't be doing so badly,' cut in Hardy Baldacre, with his customary assurance, 'for I hear he is going to be married.'

'Married!' echoed Antonia, as she felt the tide of life arrested in her veins for one moment, and, with the next, course wildly back to her beating heart. 'Married, Mr. Baldacre, and why not? But papa often hears from him, don't you, pappy, and he never mentioned it.'

'Mentioned it! I should think not,' growled Paul, with a leonine accent, as scenting danger. 'I heard from him, let me see, a month or two back. I don't believe a word of it. Who to?'

'Well, *I saw the young lady*,' persisted Baldacre, wholly unabashed, while he noted Antonia's pale and unmoved features. 'I went up in the coach with her, half way to Rainbar. She's a cousin of his own; same name. Just out from England, and ever so rich.'

'How the deuce should she go alone up to Rainbar?' said Paul, full of doubt and dread. 'Surely *we* should have heard of her, when she landed.'

'She told me that she made up her mind suddenly to come out to him—did not let him know, and only stayed a week in Sydney, at Petty's.'

'Most romantic!' said Antonia, driving the unseen dagger more deeply into her heart, after the fashion of her sex, but smiling and forcing a piteous and unreal gaiety; 'and was she fair to look upon—a blonde or brunette? Mr. Baldacre, you were evidently in her confidence; you cannot escape a description.'

'She was very good-looking indeed,' said the ruthless Hardy, who had been struck with Augusta's fresh complexion and insular manner. 'She wore a gold eyeglass, which looked odd; but she was very clever, and all that kind of thing, as any one could see.'

'Even Mr. Baldacre,' said Antonia, with a sarcastic acknowledgment. 'You must have had a delightful journey. You will tell me any other particulars that occur to you in the drawing-room. I feel quite interested.'

Here the faint signal passed which proclaims the withdrawal of the lady *convives* and the temporary separation of the sexes. What mysterious rites are celebrated above by the assembled maids and matrons, freed a while from the disturbing influence of the male element? Does a wholly unaffected, perhaps unamused expression possess those lovely features, erst so full of every virtue showing forth in every look? Do they exchange confidences? Do they *trust* each other? Do they doff their uniforms, and appear unarmed, save with truth, innocence, simplicity? *Quien sabe?*

It may not have been apparent to the lady guests, to whose comfort and enlivenment Antonia was so assiduous, so delicately, yet so unfailingly attentive in her rôle of hostess, that Miss Frankston's heart was beating, her head aching, her temples throbbing, her pulse quickened, to a degree which rendered the severest mental effort necessary to avoid collapse. They heeded not the faint smile, the piteous quivering lip, the sad eyes, while words of mirth, of compliment, of entreaty, flowed rapidly forth, as she played her part in the game we call society. But when the small pageant was over and the last carriage rolled away she threw her arms round old Paul's neck, and resting her head upon that breast which had cherished her, with all a woman's love, and but little short of a woman's tenderness, since her baby days of broken doll and lost toy, she lay in his clasp and sobbed as if her heart—poor overburdened, loving, despairing heart—was in verity, then and there, about to break.

'My darling, my darling! my own precious pet, Antonia!' said the old man, kissing her forehead, and wiping the tears from her eyes, as he had done many a time and oft in the days of her childish grief. 'I know your sorrow and its cause; but do not be too hasty. We do not know if this loose report be true. It is most unlikely and improbable to me; though, if it be true, Paul Frankston is not the man to suffer this wrong to lie a day without—without claiming his right. But do not take it for proved truth till further tidings come.'

'It is true—it is true,' moaned Antonia. 'I had a foreboding. I have been so wretched of late—so unlike your daughter, my dearest father. How could Hardy Baldacre have invented such a story? Why did he not give his—his betrothed—our address, if he had no—no—reason to do otherwise?' sobbed poor Antonia.

'I can't say—I don't know—hang her and her eyeglass—and the day I first saw him enter this house! But, no, I cannot hate the boy, whose pleasant face so often made a second youth for me. I hate taking things for granted; I must have proof

before I—and then—— Go to bed, my darling, go to bed ; I will tell you what I think in the morning.’

It was well for Miss Frankston, perhaps, that the intense pain towards which her headache had gradually culminated rendered her for a while unable to frame any mental processes. As she threw herself upon the couch she was conscious of a crushing feeling of utter darkness and blank despair, which simulated a swoon.

She awoke to a state of mind to her previously unknown. In her breast conflicting emotions passionately contended. Chief among them was the bitter disappointment, the indignant sense of slight and betrayal, endured by every woman who, conscious that each inmost sacred feeling of her heart has been given to the hero of her choice, has been deliberately forsaken for another.

True, no word of love, no promise, no seeking of favour on one side, no half denial, half granting of precious gifts, had passed between them. In one sense, the world would have held him harmless, while friends and companions of her own sex, prone always to decry and distrust all feminine victims, would most certainly hint at mistaken feelings, delusive hopes, on her part ; would be ready to welcome and to tempt the successful purloiner of a sister’s heart, the unpunished wrecker of a sister’s happiness.

But was there no tacit agreement, no unwritten bond, no fixed and changeless contract slowly but imperceptibly traced in characters faint and pale, then clearer, fuller, deepening daily to indelible imprint on her heart—upon his, surely upon his ? Were the outpourings of the hitherto sacred thoughts, feelings, emotions, from the innermost receptacles of an unworn, untempted nature, to be reckoned as the idle, meaningless badinage of society ? Were the friendly counsels, the deep, unaffected interest, the frank brotherly intercourse, all to pass for nothing—to be translated into the careless courtesy affected by every formal visitor ?

And yet, again, did not such things happen every day ? Her own experience was not so limited but that she had known more than one pale maiden, weary of life, sick unto death for a season, unable as a fever patient to simulate ordinary cheerfulness, because of the acted, if not spoken, falsehood of man. Had she pitied these too confiding victims, these hopeless, uncomplaining invalids, maimed in the battle of life, hiding the mortal wound from human gaze, bearing up with trembling steps the burden of premature age and sorrow ?

Had not her pity savoured of contempt ?—her kindness of toleration ? and now, lo ! it was her own case. But could it be *herself* ?—Antonia Frankston, who from childhood had felt no want that wealth and opportunity could supply ? who had never known a slight or felt an injury since childhood’s hour ? to whom all sorrow and sufferings incidental to what books

and fanciful persons called 'love' were as practically unknown as snow-blindness to an inhabitant of the Sahara? Was she a wronged, insulted, deserted woman like those others? It was inconceivable! it was phantasmal! it was impossible! She would sleep, and with the dawn the ghastly fear would be fled. Perhaps this dull pain in her throbbing temples, this darksome mysterious heart-agony, would leave her. Who knows?

It is wonderful how much is taken for granted every day in this world, more especially in the interest of evil devices.

Mr. Hardy Baldacre would have been sorely puzzled by a cross-examination, but no one had presence of mind to put it to the proof. He was rapid in conceiving his plans, wonderfully accurate and thoughtful in carrying them through. His endowments were exceptional in their way. Bold, even to audacity, he never hesitated; cunning and unscrupulous, he pursued his schemes, whether for money-making or for personal aggrandisement of the lower sort, with a swift and sure directness worthy of more exalted aim. Undaunted by failure, he was careless of partial loss of reputation. He was known by the superficial crowd as a successful operator whenever there was a bargain to be had in stock or station property. He was shunned and disliked by those better informed and more scrupulous in their acknowledgment of friends, as a gambler, a niggard, and a crafty profligate.

Such was the man who had succeeded, by a lying device, in working present evil—it may be, incalculable future misery—to two persons who had never injured him. In this deliberate fabrication he had two ends in view. He secretly envied and disliked Ernest Neuchamp for qualities and attainments which he could never hope to rival. He was one of a class of Austrians who cherish an ignorant prejudice against Englishmen, regarding them as conceited and prone to be contemptuous of the provincial magnate. With characteristic cunning he had kept this feeling to himself, always treating Mr. Neuchamp with apparent friendliness. But he was none the less determined to deal him an effectual blow when an opportunity should offer. The time had come, and he had struck a felon blow, which had pierced deeply the pure, passionate heart of Antonia Frankston.

He had for some time past honoured that young lady with his very questionable approbation. He admired her personally after his fashion; but he thoroughly appreciated and heartily desired to possess himself of what constituted in his eyes her crowning charm and attribute—the large fortune which Paul Frankston's heiress must, in spite of all changes of season and fluctuation of securities, inevitably inherit.

Not unskilled in the ways of women, with whom his undeniable good looks and his prestige of wealth gave him a certain popularity, he thought he saw his way during her period of anger and mortification to a dash at the lady and the money

which needed but promptness and resolution to ensure a strong chance of success.

He saw by her change of countenance, by her forced gaiety, by her every look and tone, that the barbed arrow had sped far and been surely lodged.

'Neuchamp, like a fool as he was, had evidently not written lately. The cousin (and a deuced fine girl, too, with pots of money of her own) had been staying up at Rainbar—a queer thing to do. Old Middleton, when bringing her to his place, had told every one that she was his friend Neuchamp's cousin. It would be some time before Frankston or his daughter would find out the untruth of the report. In the meantime he would butter up the old man, humbug him with regret for his occasional "wildness," promise all kinds of amendment and square behaviour for the future; then go straight to the girl, who, of course, could know nothing of his life and time, and say, "Here am I, Hardy Baldacre, with a half share in Baredown, Gogeldra, and No-good-damper (hang it; I must change that)—anyway, three of the best cattle properties of the south; here am I, not the worst-looking fellow going, at your service. Take me, and we're off to Melbourne or Tasmania for a wedding trip, and that stuck-up beggar Neuchamp may marry his cousin, and go up King Street the next week for all we care." I shan't say the last bit. But it will occur to her. Women always think of everything, though they don't say it. That might fetch her. Anyhow, the odds are right. I'm on!'

This exceedingly practical soliloquy having been transacted at his hotel during the performance of his toilette, Mr. Baldacre partook of the matutinal soda-and-brandy generally necessary for the perfect restoration of his nerves, and breakfasted, with a settled resolution to call at Morahmee that afternoon.

This intention he carried out. He found Antonia apparently not unwilling to receive him upon a more intimate conversational footing than he ever recollected having been accorded to him. She was in that state of anxiety, unhappiness, and nervous irritability which makes the patient only too willing to fly to the relief afforded by a certainty even of evil. The climber upon Alpine heights, with shuddering death-cry, ever and anon casts himself into the awful chasm on the verge of which his limbs trembled and his overwrought brain reeled. The overtaxed sufferer under the pangs of mortal disease chooses death rather than the continuance of the pitiless torment. So the agonised heart, poised on the dread pinnacle of doubt, flees to the Lethean peace of despair.

Having not unskilfully brought the conversation round to the subject of Miss Neuchamp, Mr. Baldacre touched, with more or less humour, on certain unguarded remarks of that inexperienced but decided traveller. He enlarged, as if accidentally, upon her good looks and apparent cleverness, giving her the benefit of a tremendous reputation for learning of the abstrusest

kind, and generally exaggerating all the circumstances which might render probable the admiration of an ultra-refined aristocrat.

Much of this delicate finesse, as Mr. Baldacre considered it to be, was transparent and despicable in the eyes of his listener. But, difficult as it may be to account for, otherwise than by ignoring all known rules and maxims for the comprehension of that mysterious mechanism, the feminine heart, there was, nevertheless, something not wholly disagreeable in the outspoken admiration of the bold-eyed, eager admirer who now pressed his suit.

With one of the sudden, tempestuously capricious changes of mind, common to the calmest as to the most impulsive individual of the irresponsible sex, a vague, morbid desire for finality at all hazards arose in her brain. She had listened and loved, and waited and dreamed, and dedicated her leisure, her mental power, her *life*, to the path of habit and culture which would render her every thought and speech and act more harmonious with his ideal. She had thought but of him. He had his plans, his projects, a man's career, his return to England—a thousand things to distract him—all these might delay the declaration of his love. But she had never thought of *this*! She had never in wildest flight of conjecture conjured up a *fiancée*, a cousin loved from earliest child-betrothals, to whom he doubtless had written pages of minute description of all their well-intended kindness and provincial oddities at Morahmee.

And was she to sigh and droop, and pale and wither, beneath the unexplained, unshared burden of betrayed love? Had she not seen the colour fade from the fair cheek, leaving a cold ashen-gray tint where once was bright-hued joy, eager mirth, and laughter? Had she not seen the light die out of the pleading, wistful eyes, once so deeply glowing, so tender bright, the step fall heavy, the voice lose its ring, the *woman* quit the haunted dwelling where a dead heart lay buried and a still, gray-hued hard-toned tenant sat therein, for evermore resignedly indifferent to all things beneath the sky? Was this her near inexorable fate?

No! a thousand times, no! Had she not in her veins the bold blood of Paul Frankston, the fearless sea-rover, who had more than once awed a desperate crew by the promptness of his weapon and the terror of his name? And was she to sink into social insignificance, and tacitly sue for the pity of *him* and others, because she had mistaken his feelings and he had with masculine cruelty omitted to consider hers?

No! again, no! The rebellious blood rushed to her brow, as she vowed to forget, to despise, to trample under foot, the memory, false as a broken idol, to which she had been so long, so blindly faithful. And as all men save one—for even in that hour of her wrath and misery she could not find it in her heart to include her father among the reprobate or despicable of his

sex—were alike unworthy of a maiden's trust, a maiden's prayers, why not confide herself and her blighted heart to the custody of this one, who, at least, was frank and unhesitating in proffering his love and demanding her own?

Mr. Hardy Baldacre had not thought it expedient to delay bringing matters to a climax, fearing that highly inconvenient truth, with respect to the fair Augusta, might arrive at any moment. With well-acted bluntness of sincerity he had adjured Miss Frankston to forgive his sudden, his unpremeditated avowal of affection.

'He was a rough bushman,' he confessed, 'not in the habit of hiding his feelings. On such a subject as this he could not bear the agony of anxiety or delay. He must know his fate, even if the doom of banishment, of just anger at his imprudence, went forth against him. He expected nothing else. But if, before condemning him to go back to his far-off home (little she knew of its peculiar characteristics) a lonely, despairing man, she would only give consideration to his claims, rashly but respectfully urged, she might deign to accept a manly heart, the devotion of a life that henceforth, in good or bad fortune, was hers, and hers only.'

Mr. Hardy Baldacre had an imposing, stalwart figure, by no means unfashionably attired, and Nature, while unsolicitous about his moral endowments, had gifted him with a handsome face. If not in the bloom of youth, he had not passed by a day the matured vigour of early manhood. As he bent his dark eyes upon Antonia and poured forth his not entirely original address, but which, heard in the tones of a pleading flesh-and-blood lover, sounded a deal better than it reads, Antonia felt a species of mesmeric attraction to the fatal and irrevocable 'yes,' which should open a new phase of life to her and obliterate the maddening, hopeless, endless past. *For one moment*, for one only, the fate of Antonia Frankston wavered on the dread eternal balance. She fluttered, bird-like, under the fascination of his serpentine gaze. Her words of regret and courteous dismissal refused to find utterance. At length she said, 'I must have time to consider your flattering but quite unexpected offer. You will, I am sure, not press for an immediate answer. I will see you again. Meanwhile let me tell you that I value your good opinion, and shall always recall with pleasure your very kind intention of to-day.'

But, with that still hour of evening meditation in which Antonia was wont to indulge before retiring, came calmer, humbler, more tranquillising thoughts. As she sat at her chamber window, looking out over the wide waters of the bay, in which a crescent moon caused the endless bright expanse of tremulous silver, the frowning headlands, the garden slopes, to be all clearly, delicately visible, as she heard the rhythmical, solemn cadence of the deep-toned eternal surge, she recalled the moonlighted eves, the soul-to-soul communing, of 'that lost time.'

A strong reactionary feeling occupied her heart. It seemed as if, like the rushing of the tide, the stormy sway of the ocean she loved so well, her heart had surged in rising tempest and with passion's flow, to ebb with yet fuller retrogression. Surely such were the words of this murmuring sea-song on the white midnight strand, which calmed, as with a magic anodyne, her restless, rebellious mood.

'I have been wayward and wicked,' she half sighed to herself, 'false to my better self, to the teaching of a life, unmindful of my duty to my father, who loves me better than life, of my duty to One above, who has shielded and cherished me, all undeserving as I am, up to this hour. I will repent of my sin. I will abase myself, and by prayer and penitence seek strength where alone it can be found.'

It was long ere Antonia Frankston sought her couch; but she slept for the first time that night, since a serpent trail had passed over the Eden flowers of her trusting love, with an untroubled slumber and a resolved purpose.

Pale, but changed in voice and mien, was she when she joined her father at breakfast.

'I see my little girl's own face again,' said Paul, as he embraced her, with tenderest solicitude in every line of his weather-beaten countenance. 'I thought I had lost her. She must not be hasty; she was never so before. All may come right in the end.'

'I have been a very naughty girl,' said she, with a quiet sob, 'ungrateful, too, and wicked. I have come to my senses again. It must have been the dreadful drought, I think, which is going to be the ruin of us all, body and mind. Fancy losing one's daughter, as well as one's money, because of a dry season!'

This small pleasantry did not excite Paul's risible muscles much, but he was more pleased with it than with a volume of epigrams. It showed that experienced mariner, accustomed to slightest indications of wind and wave, that a change of weather had set in. His soul rejoiced as he took his daughter in his arms and exclaimed, 'My darling, my darling, your mother is with the angels, but she watches over you still. Think of her when your old father is too far off or too dull to advise you. If she had lived——' But here there were tears in the old man's eyes, and the rugged features worked in such wise as to fashion a mask upon which no living man had ever gazed. There was a long confession. Once more every thought of Antonia Frankston's heart lay unfolded before her parent.

That morning, before driving, as usual, to the counting-house, Mr. Frankston sought the Royal Hotel, and, upon business of importance, obtained an interview with Mr. Hardy Baldacre ere that 'talented but unscrupulous' aspirant had completed his breakfast.

So decided was the assurance imparted by his visitor that, with all possible appreciation of the honour conferred, Miss

Frankston felt herself compelled to decline his very flattering offer, that Mr. Baldacre knew instinctively that any further investment of the Morahmee fortress was vain, if not dangerous. He consoled with his early visitor about the state of the season, congratulating himself audibly that his runs were understocked, and that he had no bills to meet like some people; and finally accompanied Mr. Frankston to the door, with a friendly leave-taking, to be succeeded by a bitter oath as he lighted a cigar and paced the well-known balcony.

'She has told her father. I saw the old boy was down to every move I had made. Knowing old shot, too, in spite of his politeness and humbug. I'd have backed myself, too, at a short price, if I had had only another week's innings. They may have heard something, or that fool Neuchamp is coming down and leaving everything to go to the devil. I had a good show, too. I thought I held trumps. Never mind, there are lots of women everywhere. One more or less don't make much difference. Of course, it was the "tin" that fetched me, but I don't see that I need care so much about that. I think that I shall make tracks to-morrow.'

On the morning following that of Mr. Baldacre's unlucky piece of information Paul Frankston lost no time in applying to headquarters for information. He, 'with spirit proud and prompt to ire,' would, a quarter of a century before, probably have smote first and inquired after. 'But age had tamed the Douglas blood,' and even if its current still coursed hotly on occasion, the experience of later manhood called loudly for plain proof and full evidence before he adopted the strange tale which had been told at his board.

Suspending all thought of what he might chance if *any man* were proved to have trifled with his darling's heart, he simply wrote as follows:

SYDNEY, 10th April 18—.

DEAR ERNEST—We have heard a report down here—brought to our table, in fact, by Hardy Baldacre, a man you know a little—that you are engaged and about to be married shortly to a young lady, a cousin of your own, just arrived from England. Also that Miss Neuchamp left Sydney for Rainbar, after a week's stay, and was seen by him on the way there in a coach.

For reasons which can be hereafter explained, I wish you to send me a specific admission or denial of this statement. I will write you again upon receipt of your reply to this letter. I am, always yours sincerely

PAUL FRANKSTON.

E. NEUCHAMP, Esq.

On the following evening, after sending this, the most laconic epistle which had ever passed between them, Paul no sooner beheld his daughter's face than he saw shining in her eyes the light of recovered trust, of renewed hope, of restored belief in happiness.

'She must have received a letter,' mused the sagacious parent. 'Where is it, my darling?' said he aloud.

'Where is what?' she replied with a sweet air of embarrassment, pride, and mystery commingled.

'Of course you have had a letter, or heard some news. I took the chance of the little bird's whisper coming by post. I think I am right.'

'Here it is, you wicked magician. Antonia will never have another secret from her dear old father. What agonies I suffered for my hard-heartedness! And oh, what have I escaped!'

Here was the letter, with a mere stamp thereon, which contained such a fortune in happiness as should have entitled the Government to a round sum on the principle of legacy duty:

RAINBAR, 4th April 18—.

MY DEAR ANTONIA—This letter will probably reach Sydney some days, or weeks even, before a young lady, for whom I entreat your friendship and kind offices. [H—m.] When I say that she is Augusta Neuchamp, my cousin, and my only relation in Australia, I feel certain that I need not further recommend her to you and the best of fathers and friends. [H—m.]

You will acknowledge her to be a refined and intelligent woman, that goes *sans phrase*, I should hope, and no truer heart, with more thoroughly conscientious acceptance of duty, ever dwelt in one of her sex. [H—m.]

But, writing to you with the confidence of old and tender friendship, I may as well state, delicately but decidedly, that Augusta and I have been utterly unsympathetic from our childhood, and must so remain to the end of the chapter. [Oh dear! surely I can't have read aright.]

Even at Rainbar, to which rude retreat she posted with her usual impetuosity, without giving me the opportunity of forbidding her, we had our old difficulty about preserving the peace (conversationally), and once or twice I thought we should have come to blows, as in our childish days. [Thank Heaven! Oh, oh!]

You know I am not given to dealing hardly with your sex, whatever may be their demerits, and of course I am not going to abuse my cousin in a strange land; but I am again trusting to your perfect comprehension of my real meaning, when I say that, companionably, Augusta appears to me to be the *only woman* in the world I cannot get on with. [Blessed girl, dear, charming Augusta—I love you already!]

Of course, as soon as she left Rainbar (we were on very short commons of politeness by that time) I resolved to write and ask you to take her in at Morahmee, and show her Sydney and our *monde*, in the existence of which she disbelieves. You must be prepared for her abusing everything and everybody. But I know no one who can more gently and effectually refute her prejudices than yourself, my dear Antonia. You even subjugated Jermyn Croker, I remember. By the bye, have him out to meet Augusta. She admires his file-firing style of attack. Perhaps they may neutralise each other's 'arms of precision.' [Do anything for her—ask the Duke to meet her, if she would like!]

I feel that I am writing a most indefensibly long letter. But I am very lonely, and rather melancholy, with ruin taking the place of rain—only one letter of difference—and advancing daily. Were it not so, I would

as the Irishman said, bring this letter myself. Oh, for an hour again in the Morahmee verandah, with your father smoking, the stars, the sea, the soft tones of the music, of a voice always musical in my ear! Ah me! it will not bear thinking of. It is midnight now, yet I can see a cloud of dust rising, as my men bring an outlying lot of cattle to the yard. [‘Poor fellow! poor, poor Ernest!’ sighed the voice referred to.]

I know you will be kind and *forbearing* with Augusta. She will not remain long in Australia. I think you will appreciate the unquestionably strong points in her character. Of these she has many—too many, in fact. Apparently it is time to close this scrawl—the paper says so. ‘Pray for me, Gabrielle,’ your song says, and always trust me as your sincere friend,
ERNEST NEUCHAMP.

[‘Bless him, poor dear!’]

‘So we are to have the honour of entertaining Ernest’s cousin, and not his future wife, it seems?’ said Mr. Frankston, also cheered up.

‘Never had the slightest thought of it, poor fellow,’ said Antonia, radiant with appreciation of the anti-pathetic Augusta. ‘How I could have been such a goose as to believe that wicked Hardy Baldacre, I can’t think. And, papa dear, I *might* have found myself pledged to marry him, doomed to endless misery, in my folly and madness. I shall never condemn other foolish girls again, whatever they may do.’

‘All’s well that ends well, darling,’ said the old man, with a grateful ring in his voice; ‘Paul Frankston and his own pet daughter are one in heart again. We don’t know what may happen when the rain comes.’

How joyous the world seemed after the explanation which Mr. Neuchamp’s letter indirectly afforded! Life was not a mistake after all. There was still interest in new books, pleasure in new music. A halo of dim wondrous glory was ever present during her nightly contemplation of sea and sky, in the lovely, all-cloudless autumn nights. The moan of the restless surge-voices had again the friendly tone she had heard in them from childhood. The sea was again splendid with possible heroes and argosies; it was again the realm of danger, discovery, enchantment—not a storm-haunted, boding terror, with buried treasures and drowned seamen, with treacherous, fateful wastes into which the barque, freighted with Antonia Frankston’s hopes, had been wafted forth to return no more.

It was during this enviably serene state of her mind that a note from the innocent cause of the first tragic scene which had invaded the idyl of Antonia Frankston’s life appeared on the breakfast-table at Morahmee.

MIDDLEHAM, 20th April.

DEAR MISS FRANKSTON—My cousin Ernest, with whom I believe you are acquainted, made me promise to inform you of my proposed arrival in Sydney, on the conclusion of my visit to Mr. and Mrs. Middleton. That gentleman has kindly promised to accompany me to Sydney, which we shall reach (*D.V.*) by the five o’clock train on Friday next. I purpose taking up my abode at Petty’s Hotel.—Permit me to remain, dear Miss Frankston, yours very truly,
AUGUSTA NEUCHAMP.

Of course nothing would content Antonia short of meeting at the station and carrying off to Morahmee, bag and baggage, this inestimable cousin, who had behaved so honourably, so perfectly.

Any other woman, with the mildest average of good looks, shut up in such a raft of a place as Rainbar metaphorically was, would have carried off Ernest, or any man of his age, easily and triumphantly. All the pleasant freedom of a cousin, all the provocation of a possible, unforbidden bride, the magic of old memories, the bond of perfect social equality as to rank and habitudes,—what stupendous advantages! And yet she was so happily and delightfully constituted by nature that, in spite of dangerous proximity and all other advantages, she was, it was plain from his letter, the very last woman in the world whom he could have thought of marrying. O most excellent Augusta!

Paul, of course, after a show of deep consideration, came to the conclusion that Antonia's plan was the kindest, wisest, 'onliest' thing, under the circumstances. 'Take her home straight from the train. Bother Petty's—what's the use of her moping there, and spending her money? I don't think another girl for you to have a few talks with, and drives, and shopping, and Botanical Gardens, and Dorcas work together, could do you any harm, pet. So have her home quietly to-night. We must have a little dinner for her.'

Accordingly, when the punctual train arrived bearing Miss Neuchamp and her fortunes, she was astonished to hear Mr. Middleton exclaim, 'Why, there is Miss Frankston come to meet us! How do you do, Antonia, my dear? Allow me to make known Miss Neuchamp; probably you are already acquainted with one another by description.'

Miss Neuchamp's expectations can only be matter of conjecture, but she was unaffectedly surprised at the apparition of this distinguished-looking girl, perfectly dressed and appointed, who stood on the platform, flanked by a liveried servant of London solidity of form and severe respectability of manner.

'Very, *very* happy to welcome you to Sydney, Miss Neuchamp,' said Antonia. 'Papa and I were so disappointed that we did not know of your address before you left for the bush. He won't hear of your going anywhere but to our house for the present. And, Mr. Middleton, I am pledged to bring you, as papa says we young ladies will be wrapped up in each other and leave him in solitude. I can command you, I know. Pray say you'll come, Miss Neuchamp.'

'If I may add my persuasion,' said Mr. Middleton, 'I could tell Miss Neuchamp that she could not act more discreetly for the present. I shall be delighted to wash all the dust out of my throat with some of your father's claret, Antonia. I'm your humble admirer, you know, when I'm away from home.'

'I shall be very happy to accept your hospitality, so kindly

offered, for the present,' said Augusta, overpowered by briskness of attack and defection of allies.

The grave servant immediately addressed himself to the luggage, and, handing the strange lady's nearest and dearest light weights into the carriage, remained behind to deposit one of Mr. Middleton's portmanteaus at the club, and to convey the remaining impedimenta to Morahmee per cab. As Miss Neuchamp ensconced herself in the yielding, ample cushions of the Morahmee carriage beside Antonia, and was borne along at a rapid pace, the mere rattling of the wheels upon the macadamised road was grateful and refreshing to her soul, as a reminiscence of the unquestioned proper and utterly befitting, from which she had hitherto considered herself to be hopelessly sundered by the whole breadth of ocean.

CHAPTER XXVII

WHEN Miss Neuchamp found herself installed in a large, cool upper chamber at Morahmee with a glorious view of the harbour, while on her table stood a great rapturous bouquet all freshly gathered, roses intermingled with delicate greenhouse buds, she commenced to wonder whether all her previously-formed ideas of Australia were about to be seriously modified.

A good sound reserve of prejudice reassured her, and she bided her time. She had tasted the fullest measure of comfort perceivable in Australian country life at the house of Mr. Middleton, where she had sojourned several weeks. Now she was about to experience whatever best and pleasantest the metropolis could afford.

Mr. Frankston had brought home with him Count von Schätterheims and Mr. Jermyn Croker, so that he and Mr. Middleton, having endless semi-stock and station lore to interchange, each of the ladies was provided with a cavalier.

The Count, who had been informed by Paul that Miss Neuchamp was an English heiress of vast wealth, travelling to indulge her eccentric insular taste, paid great attention to that young lady, cutting in from time to time, to the speechless wrath and exasperation of Jermyn Croker, who renewed his former acquaintance with great success.

The fair Augusta was entertained, and not wholly displeased, with their manifest admiration.

As the verandah was voted by far the pleasantest place after dinner, the whole party adjourned to this invaluable retreat, where Paul and his friend were permitted to light their cigars, and all joined in conversation with an unaffected freedom impossible in a drawing-room.

'Sing something, my darling,' said the old man, 'and then, perhaps, the Count will give us that new song of his, which I hear all Sydney is raving about.'

As the rich tones of the grand Erard came forth to them, luxuriously softened by the intervening distance, Miss Neuchamp tasted a pleasure from which she had for an age, it would seem, been debarred. She did not herself perform with

more than the moderate degree of success which can be attained by those who, without natural talent, have received thoroughly good teaching. But her training, at least, enabled her to appreciate the delicacy of Miss Frankston's touch, her finished and rare execution, and the true yet deep feeling with which she rendered the most simple melodies as well as the most complicated operatic triumphs.

Somewhat to the discomposure of the Count, who had commenced to believe the opportunity favourable, she rose, and with an expression of delight passed on to Antonia's side. Miss Neuchamp had seen too many counts to attach importance to that particular grade of continental rank; and this particular specimen of the order she held in fixed distrust, derived from the recollection of comments to which she had listened at Rainbar.

'*La belle Anglaise* prefers music to your compliments, Count,' said Mr. Croker.

'*Chacun à son tour*,' replied the injured diplomatist. 'Dey are both ver good in dere vay.'

Whatever might be the Count's shortcomings, a deficiency of self-control could hardly be reckoned among them. He twirled his enormous moustache, condoled with Paul and Mr. Middleton, and explained that his steward in Silesia had written him accounts of an unusually wet season.

'Ah, dat is de condrey! You should see him, my dear Monsieur Paul: such grops, such pasdures, such vool, so vine as de zilks.'

'How about labour?' said Mr. Middleton. 'I suppose you are not bothered as we are every now and then with a short supply, and half of that bad?'

'De bauer—vat you call "beasand" in my condrey—he vork for you all de yahres of his live, and pray Gott for your prosperity—it is his brivilech to be receive wid joys and danks. De bauer, oh, de bauer is goot man!'

'I wish our fellows received their lot with joy and thanks; half of my Steam Plains shepherds have gone off to these confounded diggings. But don't your men emigrate to America now and then? I thought half Germany went there.'

'I vill dell you one dale,' said the Count earnestly. 'I had one hauptman, overzeer, grand laboureur, ver goot man—he is of lofdy indelligence, he reat, he dinks mooch, he vill go to Amerika. I consoolt mit my stewart, he say Carl Steiger is ver goot, he is so goot as no oder mans what we have not got. I say, "Ingrease his vages, once, twyei, dree dime—he reach de vonderful som of *fivedeen bount* per yahr. He go no more. De golden demdation is doo crade; he abandon his shpirit-dask to leat mankint, he glass my vools now dill his lives is ofer."

'Ha! he wanted a summer on the wallaby track to open his mind,' said Mr. Middleton; 'that would have been a "wander-yahr" with different results, I am afraid. But I really think many of our fellows would do better if they had more of the

thrift and steady resolve of your countrymen, Count. I remember when wages were much lower than now in the colony, and when the men really saved something worth while, besides working more cheerfully. Don't you, Croker?' But Mr. Croker had departed in the midst of the Count's story, and was charming Miss Neuchamp with such delightful depreciation of the Australias, and all that in them is, that she became rapidly confirmed in her first opinion, formed soon after her arrival, that he was the best style of man she had as yet met in the colony. Mr. Croker, on his side, declared himself to be encouraged and refreshed by thus meeting with a genuine English lady not afraid to speak out her mind with respect to this confounded country, and its ways, means, and inhabitants.

The Count, fearing that the evening would be an unprofitable investment of his talents and graces, particularly in the matter of Miss Neuchamp, by whom he was treated with studied coldness, departed after having sung his song. This effort merely recalled to Augusta some occasion when she had heard it very much better performed in the Grand Opera at Paris. Jermyn Croker, who had never heard it before, openly depreciated the air, the words, the expression, and execution. With more than one household languishing for his presence, this was a state of matters not to be continued, so the Count, with graceful apologies and vows of pressing engagements, took his departure.

'You and I, Middleton, can go home to the club together, now that the *chevalier d'industrie*—beg your pardon, Frankston—I mean, of the Order of the Legion of Honour, Kaiser Fritz, and all his other orders, medals, and decorations. But I daresay the first represents his truest claim.'

'You are always charitably well informed, we know that, Croker,' said Mr. Middleton. 'Mind, I don't put my trust in princes or counts of *his* sort. I wonder how he gets along. Still swimmingly?'

'Don't think the fellow has a shilling in the world myself—never did,' replied Croker, with cheerful disbelief. 'But from what I heard the other day, he will have to make his grand *coup* soon, now that it's known his chance of marrying Harriet Folleton is all up.'

'Is it finally unsettled, then, Mr. Croker?' said Antonia. 'Every one said she admired him so much.'

'She is quite equal to that or any other madness, I believe,' said the well-informed Jermyn; 'and, with her mother's extraordinary folly to back her, there is no limit to the insanity she is capable of. But the old man *has* a little sense—people who have made a pot of money often have—and he stopped the whole affair last week.'

Mr. Neuchamp was, perhaps, more disturbed in mind than he had ever been since his arrival in Australia when he received the unusually laconic letter referred to from Paul Frankston.

Surprise, anger, uncertainty by turns took possession of his soul. A wholly new and strangely mingled sensation arose in his mind. Had he misinterpreted his own emotions as well as those of Antonia? That such was the case as to his own feeling was evidenced by his sudden and unreasonable rage when he thought of Hardy Baldacre in the character of an accepted suitor for the hand of the unconventional, innocent girl whose half-childish, half-womanly expressions of wonder, admiration, dislike, or approval, called forth by incidents in their daily studies, he could *now* so clearly remember.

Had he, then, won that priceless gem, the unbought love of a pure and loving heart—no fleeting fancy, born of vanity or caprice, but the deeply-rooted, sacred, lifelong devotion of an untarnished virgin-soul, of a cultured and lofty intellect?

This heavenly jewel had been suspended by a crowned angel above his head, and had he not, with sordid indifference, bent earthward, all unheeding, save of hard and anxious travail? He had narrowed his mind to beeves and kine, dry seasons and wet, all the merest workaday vulgarities of short-sighted mortals, resolute only in the pursuit of dross.

Had he, from neglect, heedlessness, absence, however indispensable, chilled the fond ardour of that lonely heart, cast the priceless treasure into careless or unworthy hands? Who was he, that a girl so much courted, so richly dowered in every way, as Antonia Frankston, should wait till youth was over for his deliberate approval? And yet, if she *had* delayed but for a short while longer—till *the rain came*, in fact. Ah me! was not all the Australian world waiting with exhausted, upturned eyes for that crowning, long-delayed blessing? Fancy such a reason being proffered in England. Weddings, in that happy land, were occasionally postponed till a semblance of fine weather might be calculated upon, but surely only in this antipodean land of contrast and confusion did any one defer the great question of his life until the *departure* of fine weather. Antonia was, doubtless, besieged by hosts of suitors, among them this infernal, lying scoundrel of a cad, Hardy Baldacre, besides Jermyn Croker, the Count, Hartley Selmore, and numberless others. Madness was in his thoughts—he would go down, rain or no rain, wet or dry, tempest or zephyr, hurricane or calm. He would hunt for the ruffian Baldacre, and slay him where they met.

Nevertheless he must at once answer Paul's letter, which he did to the effect that, 'He wondered that his old friends should believe any mere fabrications, unsupported by testimony, to his prejudice. Not that there was anything discreditable about the report, if true; but this was *not* true. His cousin, with misplaced heroism, had visited him in his solitude; a refined and highly educated woman, as would be apparent to all, she certainly was. But as a *wife* he had never thought of her, nor could he, if their existence ran parallel for years.' Having

despatched the letter, Ernest felt easier in mind, more removed from that condition the most irritating and intolerable of all, the accusation of wrong without the power of justification. It was hard to resist an almost uncontrollable desire to rush down to Sydney then and there to set himself right with his friends. But, as he ran over the obstacles to such a course, it seemed, on cooler thought, to be unadvisable in every way. First, there was the extreme difficulty of performing the journey: he had not a horse at Rainbar capable of carrying him across to the mail station. When he got there it was problematical whether the contractor was running a wheel mail or not. It would be undesirable, even ridiculous, to find himself a couple of hundred miles from home, stranded on the endless, dry, hopeless plain. To make a lengthened stay in Sydney, should he get there, was not to be thought of under his present circumstances of debt and anxiety. 'No,' he said, as he crushed the feeling back with a self-repression more nearly allied to heroism than mere ostentatious efforts of courage, 'no, my colours are nailed to the masthead, and there shall they hang till the cry of "victory" is once more heard, or till the fight is lost beyond mortal hope.'

So, sadly yet steadfastly, Ernest Neuchamp turned himself to the monotonous tasks which, like those of sailors on a desert island, or of the crew of a slowly-sailing ship, were yet carried on with daily, hopeless regularity. Still the ashen-gray pastures became more withered and deathlike. Still the sad, staggering lines of cattle paced in along the well-worn dusty trails to their watering-places, and paced back like bovine processions after witnessing the funeral obsequies of individuals of their race, which experience, in truth, was daily theirs.

Then the diet, once not distasteful to the much-enduring palate of youth, became wellnigh intolerable: the flaccid unfed meat, the daily bread with never a condiment, the milkless tea, the utter absence of all fruit, vegetable, herb, or esculent. Truly, as in those ancient days when a pastoral people record their sorrowful chronicles of the dry and thirsty region where no water is, 'the famine was sore in the land.'

At this time, so dreary, so endless, so crushing in its isolated, unchanging, helpless misery, Ernest was unutterably thankful for the hope and consolation which his studious habits afforded him. His library, the day's work done, filled up his lonely evening as could no other employment possible under the circumstances. He ransacked his moderate references for records of similar calamities in all lands which, unlike the 'happy isles' of Britain, are from time to time invaded with drought, the chief agent in all the recorded wholesale destruction of animal life. He noted with painstaking and laborious accuracy the duration, the signs, the consequences, the termination of such dread seasons. From old books of Australian exploration he learned, almost by heart, the sad experiences of the pioneers of the land

when they stood face to face with what to them were new and terrible foes.

'It is hard,' said he to himself, as he paced his room at midnight, after long hours of close application to such studies, 'it is hard and depressing to me, and to many a wretched colonist who has worked longer and has more on the hazard than I, to see the fruit of our labours slowly, pitilessly absorbed by this remorseless season. But what, after all, is a calamity which can be measured, like this, by a money standard, compared to one which, like this latest famine in Hindostan, counts its *human* victims by tens of thousands, by millions? See the dry record of a food failure, which comprehends the teeming human herds which cover the soil more thickly than even our poor starving flocks!

'Can we realise thousands of lowly homes where the mother sits enfeebled and spectral beside her perishing babes, whose eyes ask for the food which she cannot grant; where the frenzied peasant rushes, in the agony of despair, from his cabin that he may not hear the hunger cries, the death groans of his wife and babes; where the dead lie unburied; where the beast of prey alone roams satiated and lordly; where nature mourns like a maniac mother with tears of blood for her murdered offspring?

'Such is not, may never be, the fate of this wide, rich, peaceful land, vast and wondrous in its capabilities in spite of temporary disasters. Let us take heart. Our losses, our woes, are trifling in comparison with the world's great miseries. We are, in comparison, but as children who lose their holiday gifts of coin or cakes. Our lives, our health and strength, are all untouched. We have hope still for our unbartered heritage, the stronger for past dangers of storm and tide. The world is yet before us. There are other seas, untried and slumbering oceans, where our bark may yet ride with joyous outspread sail. Let us still labour and endure, until Fate, compelled by our steadfastness, shall be once more propitious.

'Si fractus illabitur orbis

Impavidum ferient ruinæ.

I hardly expected to be quoting Horace at Rainbar, but the old boy probably had some experience of untoward seasons, sunshiny desolation, like this of ours. I don't know whether "impavidum" applies strictly to any one but Levison. I am afraid that the "fractus orbis" pertains to our cosmos of credit, which, shattered to its core, will strike us all soon and put us to the proof of our philosophy.'

A trifling distraction was created about this time, much to Ernest's relief, by the arrival of Mr. Cottonbush, who had received instructions from Mr. Levison to muster, brand, and take delivery of the small herd of cattle, the single flock of sheep, and the lot of horses which that far-seeing speculator

had purchased from the brothers Freeman. This pastoral plenipotentiary, a wiry, reticent individual, utterly impervious to every wile and stratagem which the art of man in Australia had hitherto evolved from the very complicated industry of stock-raising, first informed the Freemans of his mission, producing a written authority with the awe-striking signature of Abstinens Levison, and then reported himself to Mr. Neuchamp.

'It is a bad season, sir,' he said, in answer to that gentleman's greeting, which of course comprehended the disastrous state of the weather, 'and many a one wouldn't bother mustering these three or four hundred crawling cattle. They might be all dead in three months for all we can see. But Mr. Levison isn't like any one else. He sends me a line to do this, or go there, and I always do it without troubling about the reasons. *He* finds them for the lot of us, and pretty fair ones they generally are when time brings 'em out.'

'I think *I* know why he made this bargain,' said Ernest, 'and I must say I wonder more about it every day. But I am so far of your opinion, now that I am becoming what you call an 'old hand,' that I shall imitate your example in letting Mr. Levison's reasons work themselves out in practice.'

'That's the best way, sir,' assented the colonel of cavalry under this pastoral general of division. 'I've never done anything but report and obey orders since I've been with Levison, this many a year. I used to talk and argue a bit with him at first. I never do now, though he's a man that will always hear what you've got to say, in case he might pick something out of it. But I never knew him alter his mind after he'd got all the information he wanted. So it's lost time talking to him.'

'And what do *you* think about this terrible season?' asked Ernest, anxiously looking at this iron man of the desert, whose experience was to his, he could *now* in this hour of wreck and ruin realise, as immeasurably superior as the grizzled second mate's to the cabin boy's when the tempest cries aloud with voice of death and the hungry caverns of the eternal deep are disclosed.

'It's bad enough,' assented Mr. Cottonbush thoughtfully, 'bad enough; and there's many a one will remember it to his dying day. In some places they'll lose most of their stock before the winter's on for want of feed, and all the rest, when it *does* come, from the cold. There were ten thousand fat sheep (or supposed to be fat) of Lateman's caught in the Peechelbah mallee the other day as they were going a short cut. When I say "caught," the water had dried up that they reckoned on, and was only found out when they was half way through. The sheep went mad and wouldn't drive. So did the chap in charge, very nigh. When he got out he had only some four thousand three hundred odd left. That was a smash, wasn't it?'

'Sheep are not so bad as cattle in one way,' said Mr. Neu-

champ ; 'you can travel them and steal grass. A good many people seem unprincipled enough to resort to the meanness of filching from their neighbours and the country generally what no man can spare in this awful time.'

'Well,' said Mr. Cottonbush, smiling and wincing slightly, 'it ain't quite the clean potato, of course ; but if your sheep's dying at home, what can you do ? Every man for himself, you know ; and you can't let 'em stop on the run and die before your eyes. We've had to do a bit of it ourselves. But the old man, he bought two or three whacking big bits of country in the Snowy Mountains, Long Plains, the Gulf, Yarrangobilly, and two or three more, enough to feed all the sheep in the country, and started ours for it directly after shearing, while the roads were good. *He* knew what was coming and provided in time, same as he always does. Blessed if he didn't lease a lot of the country he could spare to people who were hard pushed and came late, so he got his own share cheap.'

'And was there abundance of grass and water ?'

'Green grass two feet high, running creeks all the summer, enough to make your mouth water. If we get rain down before the snow comes next month our flocks will come back better than they went, and with half as much wool again as the plains sheep.'

That day Mr. Cottonbush informed the Freeman family that, inasmuch as the Rainbar stockyard was a strong and secure enclosure, and as his employer, Mr. Levison, was a very particular man in having cattle that he bought properly branded up, he didn't like any to be left over, and they must yard every mother's son of 'em.

So, as Mr. Neuchamp had kindly given permission for his yard to be used, the entire Freeman clan, including a swarm of brown-faced, bare-legged urchins, arrived on the following day with the whole of their herd. It was a strange sight, and not without a proportion of dramatic interest. The cattle were so emaciated that they could hardly walk ; many of them staggered and fell. In truth, as they moved up in a long weebegone procession, they looked like a ghostly protest against man's lack of foresight and Heaven's wrath. The horses were so weak from starvation that they could barely carry their riders. One youngster was fain to jump off his colt, that exhausted animal having come to a dead halt, and drive him forward with the cattle.

Even the men and the boys had a wan and withered look. Not that they had been on short commons, but, dusty, sun-burned, and nervously anxious to secure every animal that could walk to the yard, they harmonised very fittingly with their kine.

When they arrived at the yard Mr. Cottonbush counted them carefully in, and then signified to the vendors that, in his opinion, it would be wise of them to go back and make a final

'scrape,' as he expressed it, of their pasture-ground, lest there might inadvertently have been any left behind.

'That sort of thing always leads to trouble, you know,' said he; 'there's a sort of doubt which were branded and which were not. Now, Mr. Levison bought every hoof you own, no milkers reserved and all that; he don't believe in having any of the best cattle kept back. So you'd better scour up every beast you can raise before we begin to brand. We can tail this mob, now they're here.'

This supplementary proceeding resulted in the production of about thirty head of cattle, among which there curiously happened to be, by accident, half a dozen cows considerably above the average in point of breeding and value.

This very trifling matter of a 'cockatoo's' muster having been thus concluded, all the horses having been yarded, and the flock of sheep driven up—Mr. Levison having made it a *sine quâ non* that he would have all or none—the fires were lighted and the brands put in.

To the wild astonishment of the Freemans, Mr. Cottonbush, having put the Ξ NE brand in the fire, commenced to place that conjoined hieroglyph upon every cow, calf, bullock, and steer, assisted by Mr. Windsor, Charley Banks, and the black boys.

'Why, "the cove" ain't bought 'em, surely?' said Joe Freeman, with a look of much distrust and disapproval. 'Where's he to get the sugar, I want to know; or else it's a "plant" between him and old Levison.'

'When the stock's counted and branded you'll get your cheque,' said the imperturbable manager; 'that's all you've got to bother your head about. It's no business of yours, if you're paid, whether Levison chooses to sell 'em, or boil 'em, or put 'em in a glass case.'

'Well, I'm blowed,' said Bill Freeman, 'if we ain't regularly sold. If I'd a-known as they was a-comin' here, I'd have seen Levison in the middle of a mallee scrub with his tongue out for water before I'd have sold him a hoof. One comfort: the cash is all right, and half of these crawlers will die before spring.'

'Not if rain comes within a month,' said Mr. Cottonbush cheerily. 'You'd be surprised what a fortnight will do for stock in these places, and the grass grows like a hotbed. These cattle are smallish and weak, but not so badly bred. They'll fill out wonderfully when they get their fill. You'd better wait and see them counted, and then you can have your cheque.'

Jack Windsor and Charley Banks worked with a will, so did the younger members of the yeomanry plantation. The grown cattle were of course pen-branded. By nightfall every one was marked very legibly and counted out. Four hundred and seventy head of cattle over six months old, eighty-four horses, and twelve hundred mixed sheep, principally weaners. These last were fire-branded on the side of the face, provided with a shepherd, and kept near home.

The necessary preliminaries being concluded, Mr. Cottonbush handed a cheque, at the prices arranged, to Abraham Freeman, and turned the horses and cattle out of the yard.

'You haven't a horn or a hoof on Rainbar now,' said he composedly; 'perhaps you have 'em in a better place, in your breeches pockets; and remember I'll be up here next November, or else Mr. Levison, to take up your selections as agreed. Then, I suppose, you'll be fixing yourself down upon some other miserable squatter. You're bound not to stop here, you know.'

Having thus accomplished his mission clearly and unmistakably, Mr. Cottonbush, whose acquaintance Ernest had first made at Turonia when he took delivery of Mr. Drifter's cattle, declared his intention of starting at daybreak. Waste of time was never laid to the charge of Mr. Levison's subordinates. 'Like master like man' is a proverb of unquestionable antiquity. There is more in it than appears upon the surface. Whatever might have been the moulding power, it is certain that his managers, agents, and overseers attached great importance to those attributes of punctuality, foresight, temperance, and thrift which were dear to the soul of Abstinens Levison.

'I'm glad these crawlers of cattle are branded up and done with while it's dry, likewise the horses. All this kind of work is so much easier and better done in dry weather,' said the relaxing manager. 'They're not a very gay lot to look at now. But I shouldn't wonder to see you knocking ten pounds a head out of some of those cats of steers before this day two years.'

'Ten pounds a head!' echoed Ernest. 'Why not say twenty, while you're about it?'

'You don't believe it,' said Mr. Cottonbush calmly, rubbing his tobacco assiduously in his hands preparatory to lighting his pipe. 'Levison writes that stock are going up in Victoria to astonishing prices, and that what they'll reach, if the gold keeps up, no man can tell. So your cattle *might* fetch twenty pounds after all.'

'What would you advise me to do with the Freemans' stock, now that I have got them?' asked Ernest.

'If I was in your place,' said Mr. Cottonbush judicially, 'I should stick to the cattle, for every one of them, down to the smallest calf, will be good money when the rain comes. The sheep also you may as well keep: they'll pay their own wages if you put 'em out on a bit of spare back country, and there's plenty that your cattle never go near. You could bring 'em in to shear them, and they'll increase and grow into money fast enough. You might have ten thousand sheep on Rainbar and never know it.'

'I don't like sheep much,' said Ernest; 'but these are very cheap, if they live, and there is plenty of room, as you say. And the horses?'

'Sell every three-cornered wretch of 'em—a set of upright-shouldered, useless mongrels—directly you get a chance,' said

Mr. Cottonbush with unusual energy of speech. 'And now you're able to clear the run of 'em, being your own, which you never could have done if they remained theirs. You'd have had young fellows coming for this colt or that filly till your head was gray.'

'I hope not,' said Ernest, laughing; 'but I am glad to have all the stock and land of Rainbar in my own hands once more.'

Mr. Cottonbush departed at dawn, and once more Ernest was alone in the gray-stricken, accursed waste, wherein nor grass grew nor water ran, nor did any of these everyday miracles of Nature appear likely again to be witnessed by despairing man.

Still passed by the hungry hordes of travelling sheep, still the bony skeletons of the passing cattle herds. No rain, no sign of rain! All pastoral nature, brute and human, appeared to have been struck with the same blight, and to be forlorn and moribund. The station cattle became weaker and less capable of exertion; 'lower,' as Charley Banks called it, as the cold autumn nights commenced to exhibit their keenness. The Freemans relinquished all control over their cattle, and chuckled over the weakly state of the Rainbar herd.

The autumn had commenced, a peerless season in all respects save in the vitally indispensable condition of moisture. The mornings were crisp, with a suggestive tinge of frost, the nights absolutely cold, the days, as usual, cloudless, bright, and warm. If there was any variation it was in the direction of a lowering, overcast, cloudy interval, when the bleak winds moaned bodingly, but led to no other effect than to sweep the dead leaves and dry sticks, which had so long passed for earth's usual covering, into heaps and eddying circular lines. The roughening coats on the feeble frames of the stock, now enduring the slow torture of the cold in the lengthening nights, told a tale of coming collapse, of consummated, unquestioned ruin. Daily did Ernest Neuchamp dread to rise, to pass hours of hopeless despondency among these perishing forms, dying creatures roaming over a dead earth during their brief term of survival! Daily did he almost come to loathe the sight of the unpitying sun, which, like a remorseless enemy, spared not one beam of his burning rays, veiled not one glare of his deadly glance. He had an occasional reminiscence of the steady, reassuring tones, the unwavering purpose of which abode with the very presence of Abstinens Levison. But for these he felt at times as though he could have distrusted the justice of an over-ruling Power, have cursed the hour of his birth, and delivered himself over to despair and reprobation.

While Mr. Neuchamp was not far removed from this most unusual and decidedly unphilosophical state of mind, it so chanced on a certain afternoon (it was that of Wednesday, the eighteenth day of May, as was long after remembered) that he and Jack Windsor were out together, a few miles from home,

upon the ironical but necessary mission of procuring a 'fat beast.' This form of speech may be thought to have savoured too much of the wildly improbable. The real quest was of course, for an animal in such a state of comparative emaciation as should not preclude his carcass from being converted into human food. The meat was not palatable, but it supported life in the hardy Anglo-Saxon frame. It was all they had, and they were constrained to make the best of it.

'Look at these poor devils of cattle,' said Jack, pointing to a number of hide-bearing anatomies moving their jaws mechanically over the imperceptible pasture. 'They have water, but what the deuce they find to eat I can't see. There's that white steer, that red cow, and one or two more, with their jaws swelled up. There's plenty of 'em like that.'

'From what cause?' asked Mr. Neuchamp. 'Cancer is not becoming epidemic, I hope.'

'It comes from the shortness of the feed, *I think*,' returned Jack; 'you see the poor creatures keep licking and picking every time they see a blade of grass, if it's only a quarter of an inch long; half their time they miss their aim and rattle their jaws together with nothing between them. That's what hurts 'em, I expect, and after a bit it makes their heads swell.'

'I wonder what they would think in England of such an injury, occurring in what we always believed to be a rich pastoral country.'

'So it is, sir, when the season's right. I expect in England you have your bad seasons in another way, and get smothered and flooded out with rain; and the crops are half rotten; and the poor man (I suppose he is *really* a poor man there, no coasting up one side of a river and down the other for six months, with free rations all the time) gets tucked up a bit.'

'As you say, Jack, there are bad seasons, which mean bad harvests, in England,' answered Ernest, always inclined to the diversion of philosophical inquiry; 'and the poor man there, as you say, properly so called, inasmuch as he requires more absolute shelter, more sufficient clothes in the terrible winter of the north, than our friends who pursue the ever-lengthening but not arduous track of the wallaby in Australia. They may in England, and do occasionally, I grieve to say, if unemployed and therefore unfed, actually *starve to death*. But what are those cattle just drawing in?'

'Those belong to a lot that keeps pretty well back,' answered Jack, 'and they're different in their way from these cripples we've been looking at, as they've had something to *eat*, but they're pretty well choked for a drink. I don't know when they've had one. That's how it is, you see, sir; half the cattle's afraid to go away for the water, and the rest won't leave what little feed there is till they're nearly mad with drouth. It's cruel work either way. I'm blest if that wasn't a drop of rain!'

This sudden and rare phenomenon caused Ernest to take a cursory examination of the sky, which he had long forborne to regard with hope or fear. It was clouded over. But such had been the appearance of the firmament scores of times during the last six months. The air was still, sultry, and full of the boding calm which precedes a storm. Such signs had been successfully counterfeited, as Ernest bitterly termed it, once a month since the last half-forgotten showery spring. He had observed a halo round the moon on the previous night. There had been dozens of dim circular rings round that planet all the long summer through. The rain was certainly falling now. So had it commenced, on precisely such a day, with the same low bank of clouds, many a time and oft, and stopped abruptly in about twenty minutes, the clouds disappearing, and the old presentment reverting to a staring blue sky, a mocking, unveiled sun therein, with the suddenness of a transformation scene in a pantomime.

'I think that spotted cow looks as near meat as anything we're likely to get, sir,' said Jack Windsor, interrupting the train of distrustful reverie. 'It begins to look as if it meant it. Lord send we may get well soaked before we get home!'

Mr. Windsor's pious aspiration was appropriate this time. They reaped the benefit of a genuine and complete saturation before they reached the yard with the small lot of cattle they were compelled to take in for companionship to their 'fat beast.' There was no appearance of haste about the rain, no tropical violence, no waterspout business. It trickled down in slow, monotonous, still, and settled drizzle, much as it might have done in North Britain. It only did not stop; that was all. It was hopefully continuous all the evening. And when Mr. Neuchamp opened his casement at midnight he thankfully listened to the soaking, ceaseless downpour, which seemed no nearer a sudden conclusion than during the first hour.

Before dawn Mr. Neuchamp was pacing his verandah, having darted out from his couch the very moment that he awoke. The temperature had sensibly fallen; so had the clouds, which were low and black; and still the rain streamed down more heavily than at first. There was apparently no alteration likely to take place during the day. The water commenced to flow in the small channels. The minor watercourses, the gullies, and creeks were filling. Wonder of wonders—it was a settled, set-in, hopelessly wet day! What a blessed and wonderful change from last week! Ernest had a colloquy with Charley Banks about things in general, and then permitted himself a whole day's rest—reading a little, ciphering a little, and looking up his correspondence, which had fallen much into arrear. As the day wore on the rain commenced to show determination, heavily, hour after hour, with steady fall, saturating the darkened earth, no longer dusty, desolate, hopelessly barren. The gaping fissures were filled. The long disused ruts and

gutters ran full and foaming down to their ultimate destination, the river. That great stream refused to acknowledge any immediate change of level from so inconsiderable a cause as a rainfall so far from its source. But, doubtless, as Charley Banks pointed out, in a week or more it would 'come down' in might and majesty, when the freshets at the head waters should have time to gather forces and swell the yellow tide. It was well if there was not then a regular flood, but that would do them no harm; might swamp out the Freemans, perhaps, but as long as Tottie wasn't drowned, and the old woman, the rest of the family might be swept down to Adelaide for all he, Charley, cared. So let it rain till all was blue. There was no mistake this time. It was a general rain. We should have forty-eight hours of it before it stopped. Every hoof of stock was off the frontage now and away back, where there was good shelter and a trifle of feed. In a fortnight after this there would be good 'bite' all over Rainbar run. We should have a little comfort in our lives now. What a pull it was, that old Cottonbush had branded up those last stores before the rain came.

Thus Mr. Charles Banks, jubilantly prophetic, with the elasticity of youth, having thrown off at one effort all the annoyance and privation of the famine year, was fully prepared for an epoch of marvels and general prosperity.

The day ended as it had commenced. There was not a moment's cessation from the soaking, pouring, saturating, dripping downpour of heaven's precious rain. 'As the shower upon the mown grass,' saith the olden Scripture of the day of David the King. Doubtless the great City of Palaces was erst surrounded by shaven lawns, by irrigated fields and gardens. But on the skirts of the far-stretching yellow deserts, tenanted then as now by the wild tribes, to whom pasture for their camels and asses, and horses and sheep, was as the life-blood of their veins, doubtless there were thousands of leagues all barren, baked sterility, until the long-desired rain set in, when, as if by magic, herbs and waving grains and flowerets fair sprang up, and rejoiced the hearts of the tribe, from the silver-bearded sheik to the laughing child.

So it would be at Rainbar. Ernest knew this from many a conversation which he had had upon the subject with Jack Windsor and Charley Banks. In this warm, dry-soiled country, the growth of pasture under favourable circumstances is well-nigh incredible. Nature adapts herself to the most widely differing conditions of existence with amazing fertility of resource. In more temperate zones the partial heat which withers the flower and the green herb when cut down, slays the plant and destroys germination in the seed for evermore. Here, in the wild waste, when the fierce and burning blast revels over scorched brown prairies, and the whirlwind and the sand column dance together over heated sands, the plant life is well

and truly adapted to the strange soil, the stranger clime. The tall grasses grow hard and gray, or faint yellow, under the daily desiccation which spares no tender growth; but they remain nutritive and life-sustaining for an incredible period, if but the necessary cloud water can be supplied at long intervals. Then the hard-pushed pastoral colonist, when he found that his flocks had bared to famine pitch the pastures within reach of the watercourses, which were his sole dependence in the earlier days, was compelled to resort to the most ancient practice of well-digging, of which he might have gained the idea from the familiar records of a hard-set pastoral people in the sandy wastes of Judea. Receding to the wide plains and waterless forests of the vast region which lay cruelly distant from any known stream or fountain, which was in summer regularly abandoned by the aboriginal denizens of the land, he sank, at much expense, wells of great depth—at first with uncertain result; but, though much of the water thus painfully obtained—for from three to five hundred pounds for two to three hundred feet sinking was no uncommon expense in a single well—was brackish, much salt, still progress was made. The stock was enabled in the midst of summer heat or protracted autumn drought to feed upon these previously locked-up pastures, upon the saline herbs and plants, the nutritious, aromatic shrubs peculiar to this land, where no white man had ever before seen stock except in winter.

By degrees it began to be asserted that 'back country,' *i.e.* the lands remote from all visible means of subsistence for flocks and herds, as far as water was concerned, paid the speculative pastoral occupier better than the 'frontage,' or land in the neighbourhood of permanent creeks, and of the few well-known rivers. *There* roamed that unconscionable beast of prey, the all-devouring free selector. He could select the choicest bends, the richest flats, the deepest river reaches, even where the squatter had fenced or enclosed. For were not the waters free to all? He naturally appropriated the best and most tempting conjunctions of 'land and water.' These were precisely those which were most profitable, most necessary, occasionally most indispensable to the proprietor of the run.

But it was not so with the back blocks. There capital yet retained much of its ancient supremacy. The wielder of that implement or weapon was enabled to cause his long-silent wilderness to blossom as the rose, by means of dams and wells. He was in a position also to drive off, keep out, and withstand the invading pseudo-grazier, with his sham purchases and his wrongful grass rights.

Thus, by a wise provision of the Land Act, all improvements of a value exceeding forty pounds sterling, when placed by the pastoral tenant upon the Crown lands which he was facetiously supposed to rent, protect the lands upon which they stand, or which, in the case of a well, they underlie; that is to

say, a five-hundred-guinea well or a hundred-pound dam cannot be free-selected or taken cool possession of as a conditional purchase by the land marauder of the period. Some people might see a slight flavour of fairness in this provision which has not always in other colonies, Victoria notably, been granted by the democratic wolf to the conservative lamb. However the Government of New South Wales may have erred in other respects, it has in the main so far ruled the outnumbered pastoralists with a courtesy, fairness, and freedom from small greed such as might be expected from one body of gentlemen in responsible dealing with a class of similar social rank.

One successful well or dam, therefore, converted a block of country hitherto useless for nine months out of the twelve into a run capable of carrying ten thousand sheep all the year round. Of course, any portion of the crown estate the conditional purchaser might 'take up,' or, without notice, occupy. But where was he to procure his water from? He had not often five hundred pounds, or if so, did not 'believe' in such solemn disbursement for 'mere improvements.' Therefore he still haunted, cormorant-like, the rivers and creeks—the 'permanent water' of the colonist. To the younger sons of ancient houses, scions of Howards, Somersets, and of the untitled nobility of Britain, he conceded the right to live like hermits in the Thebaid, upon their artificially and expensively watered back blocks.

A special peculiarity of the ocean-like plains of inmost Australia is the miraculous growth of vegetation after the profuse irrigation which invariably succeeds a drought. In the warm dry earth, now converted into a bed of red or black mud, saturated to its lowest inch, and rich for procreation of every green thing, lies a hoard of seeds of wondrous number and variety of species. Broad and green, in a few days, as the vivid growth from the aged, still fruitful bosom of mysterious Nile, along with the ordinary pasture appear the seed leaves of unknown, half-forgotten grasses, reeds, plants, flowers, never noticed except in an abnormally wet season. In cycles of ordinary moisture, the true degree of saturation not having been reached, they lie deathlike year after year, until, aroused by Nature's unerring signal, they arise and burst forth into full vitality. In such a time an astonishing variety of herbs, plants, and flowers is to be seen mingling with gigantic grasses, such as Charley Banks described to Mr. Neuchamp when he prophesied, after forty-eight hours of steady rain had fallen, that on the Back Lake Plains this year he would be able to tie the grass tops together before him, *as he sat on horseback*. Mr. Neuchamp had never before discovered his lieutenant in a wilful exaggeration; but on this occasion he felt mortified that he should still be supposed a fit subject upon which to foist humorous fabrications.

'I see you don't believe me,' said Charley, rather put out in turn at not being credited. 'Let's call Jack. You ask him the height of the tallest grass he ever saw in this part of the country in a real wet season. There he goes. Here, Jack, Mr. Neuchamp wants to ask you a question.'

'I wish to know,' said Ernest gravely, 'to what height you have ever known the grass grow up here in a first-rate season.'

'Well, I don't know about measurement,' said Jack, 'but I remember at Wardree one year we had to muster up all the old screws on the run to give the shepherds to ride.'

'Why was that?'

'Because they couldn't see their sheep in the long grass; and out on a plain where the grass was over their own heads, it was hard work not to lose themselves. Of course it was an out-and-out year, something like this is going to be, I expect. Why, I've tied the grass over my horse's shoulder in the spring, as *I've been riding along*, many a time and often.'

Charley Banks smiled.

'That will do, John,' said Mr. Neuchamp.

'I apologise fully,' said Ernest, as soon as they were alone. 'I promise never to lack that confidence in your statements, my dear fellow, which I must say I have hitherto found in every way deserved. How are the cattle doing? You have been out all day, and must have been soaked through and through.'

'I didn't put on anything that water could hurt,' said Charley, 'or very much in the way of quantity either. Jack and I only wanted to be sure of the line the cattle took, so as to get after them to-morrow. We could track them as if they had been walking in batter pudding. If they got off the run now we should have no horses to fetch them back with, and if we left them away till they got strong, they'd be broken in to some other man's run, which would be so much time lost. Luckily they all made for the Back Lake, where there's some sandy ridges and good bedding ground. Freemans' cattle are mixed up with the "circle dots," which is all the better, as they know the run well, and can't be got off it. Lucky they're branded.'

'And how about the old herd?'

'We didn't tire our horses going after them, but, by the main run of the tracks, the nearest of them will stop at the Outer Lake timber; and the head cattle will go slap back to the very outside boundary. We've no neighbours at the back, so the farther back they go the fresher the feed will be. *They're right.*'

'I suppose they will begin to improve in a few months?'

'Improve?' echoed Mr. Banks; 'if this weather is followed up, every beast on Rainbar run, down to a three-months-old

calf, will be mud fat *in three months*, and you may begin to take away the first draft of a thousand head of fat cattle that we can send to market—and a rising market, too—before next winter.'

Mr. Neuchamp did not shout aloud, nor cast any part of his clothing into the air, like Jack Windsor: his way of receiving sudden tidings of weal or woe was not demonstrative. But he grasped Charley Banks's hand, and looked into the face of the pleased youngster with a gleam in his eye and a look of triumph such as the latter had rarely witnessed there.

'We have had to wait—"to suffer and be strong,"—Charley, my boy,' he said, 'but I think the battle is won now. You shall have your share of the spoils.'

When Mr. Neuchamp sallied forth on the second day after the rain, he could not but consider himself in a somewhat similar position to one of the Noachian family taking an excursion after the flood. True, his flood had been of a temporary and wholly beneficial nature, but not the less had it entirely altered the expression upon the face of Nature. Aqueous effects and results were prominently apparent everywhere. Mud and hardened sandy spaces, already flushed with green, had succeeded to the pale, dusty, monotoned landscape.

Thus, once more, short as had been the time of change, the eye was relieved by the delicate but distinct shade of green which commenced to drape the long-sleeping, spellbound frame of the mighty Mother. Even in the driest seasons, except on river flats, there are minute green spikelets of grass at or just below the surface. Let but one shower of rain fall, softly cherishing, and on the morrow it is marvellous to perceive what an approach to verdure has been made. Then the family of clovers, long dead and buried, but having bequeathed myriads of burr-protected; oleaginous seed-vessels to the kind keeping of the baked and powdered soil, reappear in countless hosts of minute leaflets, which grow with incredible rapidity. It is not too much to say that in little more than a week after the 'drought broke up' at Rainbar there was grass several inches high over the entire run. The salt-bushes commenced to put forth tender and succulent leaves. All nature drew one great sigh of relief, every living creature—from the small fur-covered rodents and marsupials which pattered along their minute but well-beaten paths when the sun was low to the water, from the wild mare that galloped in snorting through the midnight, with her lean, tireless offspring, to sink her head to the very eyes in the river when she reached it, to the thirsty merino flock at the well-trough, or the impoverished herd that struggled in hungered and athirst to muddy creek or treacherous river bank—every living creature did sensibly rejoice and give thanks, audibly or otherwise, for this merciful termination to the long agony of the Great Drought.

That morning of the 18th May was a fateful morn to many a

struggling beginner like Ernest Neuchamp ; to many a grizzled veteran of pioneer campaigns and long wars of exploration, of peril of body and anguish of mind ; to many a burdened sire with boys at school to pay for, and the girls' governess to consider, whom the next year's losses, if *the rain held off*, would compel the family to dispense with.

On the night which preceded that day of deliverance Ernest Neuchamp went to bed utterly ruined and hopelessly insolvent ; he arose a rich man, able within six months to pay off double the amount of every debt he owed in the world, and possessed beside of a run and stock the market value of which exceeded at least fourfold what he had paid for it.

This was a change, sudden as an earthquake, swift as a revolution, almost awe-striking in its shower of sudden benefits, dazzling in its abrupt change from the dim light of poverty, self-denial, and anxiety, to an unquestioned position of wealth, reputation, and undreamed-of success.

How differently passed the days now ! What variety, what hope, what renewed pleasure in the superintendence of details ever leading upward to profit and satisfaction in a hundred different directions !

Day by day the grass grew and burgeoned and clothed the flats with a meadow-like growth akin to that of his native country. None of this amazing crop, however, was used except by the flocks of travelling sheep returning strong and well-doing to their long-abandoned homes. These passing hosts made so little impression upon the wonderfully rapid growth that, as Mr. Banks averred, 'you could not see where they had been.' The station cattle, and even the small flock of sheep, were 'well out back,' and, presumably, were content to leave the 'frontage' as a reserve for summer needs.

Concurrently with this plenty and profusion, in which every head of the Rainbar stock revelled, from Mr. Levison's 'BI,' whose skin now shone with recovered condition, and who snorted and kicked up his heels as he galloped into the yard with the working horses, to the most dejected weaner of the Freeman 'crawlers,' came strangely exciting news of the wondrous discovery of gold in Victoria, and the rapid rise in the price of meat.

Fat stock were higher and higher in each succeeding market, until the previously unknown and, as the democratic newspapers said, unjustifiable and improper price of ten pounds per head for fat cattle was reached, with a corresponding advance for sheep. As this astounding but by no means dismaying intelligence was conveyed to Mr. Neuchamp in the hastily torn open newspaper which he was glancing at outside, just as Jack Windsor had directed his attention to the gambols of 'BI,' who, with arched neck and perfect outline, fully justified Mr. Levison's encomium upon his shape, that gentleman's prophecy as to the enhanced value of Rainbar reaching twenty thousand

pounds when 'BI' kicked up his heels seemed likely to be fulfilled to the letter.

Mr. Windsor, in his enthusiasm concerning the condition of the horse left in his charge, and that of the stud generally, had for the moment omitted to open an unpretending missive delivered by the same post which lay in his hand. As Ernest turned to walk towards the house he was stopped by the sound of a deep and bitter curse, most infrequent now upon the lips of his much altered follower.

CHAPTER XXVIII

As Mr. Neuchamp turned, he saw an expression so fell and deadly upon Jack's changed face that he instinctively recalled the day when he first stood before him with levelled weapon and the same stern brow.

'What is the matter, John?' said Ernest kindly. 'Any bad news?'

'Bad enough,' said the man gloomily. 'Never mind me, sir, for a minute or two. I'll come to the house, and tell you all about it directly I've saddled Ben Bolt.'

Then, repressing with an effort all trace of previous emotion, and permitting his features to regain their usual expression, he proceeded to catch and lead to the stable that determined animal, whose spirit had by no means been permanently softened by adversity, as was exhibited by his snorting and trembling as usual when the rein was passed over his neck and the bridle put on. Having done this, Mr. Windsor carefully saddled up, and shortly afterwards appearing in his best suit of clothes, strapped a small roll to the saddle, and rode quietly up to the verandah of the cottage.

'I see that something unusual has happened,' said Mr. Neuchamp, with sympathy in his voice. 'Tell me all about it.'

'You'll see it here,' said his retainer, handing over a short and simple letter from Carrie Walton, in which the impending tragedy of a woman's life-drama was briefly told. In a few sorrowful words the girl told how that, worked upon by the continuous persuasions and reproaches of her parents, she had consented to marry Mr. Homminey on the following Friday week. She had not heard from him, John Windsor, for a long time—perhaps he had forgotten her. In a few days it would be too late, etc. But she was always his sincere friend and well-wisher, Caroline Walton.

'You see, sir,' began Mr. Windsor, with something of his old confidence and cool calculation of difficulties in an emergency which required instant bodily exertion. 'It's been this way. I've been so taken up with these new cattle, and the way everything's been changed lately, since the weather broke, that I've

forgot to write to the poor thing. I was expecting to go down with the first lot of fat cattle next month, and I laid it out to square the whole matter, and bring her back with me, if you'll give us the hut by the river-bank to live in. I've been a little late—or it looks like it—and they've persuaded her into marrying that pumpkin-headed, corn-eating Hawkesbury hog, just because he's got a good farm and some money in the bank. But if I can get down before the time, if it's only half an hour, she'll come to me, and I think I can win the heat if Ben Bolt doesn't crack up.'

'What time have you to spare between this and the day of the wedding?' inquired Ernest.

'It's to be on Friday week,' said Jack.

'You can never be there in time—it is impossible!' cried Ernest in a tone of voice which showed his sympathy with his faithful servant. 'I pity you sincerely, John!'

'Pity be hanged, sir. You'll excuse my way of talking. I'm a little off my head, I know; what I mean to say is, I ain't one of those chaps that can grub upon pity, and the likes of it. But I *can* do it, if the old horse holds out, and luckily Joe's been riding him regular since the feed came, and he's fit to race a mile, or travel a hundred, any day.'

'Why, it is a hundred and eighty miles to the mail coach station, and unless you get there by to-morrow night, you can't get down for another week.'

'*I shall* get there,' replied Jack slowly and with settled determination. 'Ben can do a hundred miles a day, for two days at a pinch, and I have a good bit of the second night thrown in. The mail don't start until midnight. If we're not there, I'll turn shepherd again, and sell Ben to a thrashing machine; we won't have any call to be thought horse or man again. I shall get to Mindai some time to-night—that's eighty miles—and save the old horse all I can; then start about three in the morning, and polish off the hundred miles, if he's the horse I take him to be. He'll have easy times after, if he does it, for I'll never sell him. Good-bye, sir.'

'Good-bye, John; I wish you good fortune, as I really believe my young friend Carry's happiness is at stake. Here are some notes to take with you—money is always handy in elopements, I am informed.'

'You have my real thanks, sir,' said Jack, pocketing the symbols of power; 'I've been a good servant to you, sir, though I say it. I shan't be any the worse if I've a good wife to keep me straight—that is, if I get her.'

Here Mr. Windsor gave a short groan, followed by an equally brief imprecation, as he pictured the shining-faced giant, in a wondrous suit of colonial tweed, leading Carry away captive to his Flemish farm, evermore to languish, or grow unromantically plump, in a wilderness of maize-fields varied by mountains of pumpkins.

Ernest watched him as he mounted Ben Bolt, whose ears lay back, whose white-cornered eyes stared, whose uneasy tail waved in the old feline fashion, sufficient to scare any stranger about to mount. He saw him take the long trail across the plain at a bounding canter, which was not changed until horse and rider travelled out of the small Rainbar world of vision, and were lost amid the mysteries of the far sky-line. Much he marvelled at this Australian edition of 'Young Lochinvar,' only convinced that if that enterprising gallant had been riding Ben Bolt, when

On to his croupe the fair ladye he swung,

the layers of the odds might have confidently wagered on a very different ending to the ballad. He did not anticipate that the reckless bushman would attempt to 'cut out' his sweetheart from the assembled company of friends and kinsfolk. Yet he could not clearly see how he proposed, so close was the margin left, to possess himself of the fair Carry. But that, if Ben Bolt did not break down, Jack Windsor would, in some shape or form, effect his purpose, and defeat the intended disposal of the Maid of the Inn, he was as certain as if he had witnessed their arrival at Rainbar.

It is not placed beyond the reach of doubt whether or not this matrimonial adventure in any way led Mr. Neuchamp to considerations involving similar possibilities. It may, however, be looked upon as an authenticated legend that although several letters of a congratulatory nature had passed between Paul Frankston and Mr. Neuchamp, 'since the weather broke,' the latter thought it necessary to write once more and acquaint him with the fact that early next month he should commence to send off fat cattle, and that he would come down himself in charge of the first drove.

In the austere boreal regions of the old world all nature, dormant or pulsating, dumb or informed with speech, waits and hopes, prays and fears, until the unseen relaxation of the grasp of the winter god. Then the ice-fetters break, the river becomes once more a joyous highway, echoing with boat and song, and gay with ensigns. Once more the unlocked earth receives the plough; once more the leaf buds, the flower all blushing steals forth in woodland and meadow; once more the carol of bird, the whistle of the ploughman, the song of sturdy raftsmen proclaim that the war of Nature with man is ended. So beneath the Southern Cross the unkind strife which Nature ever and anon wages with her children is accented not by wintry blast and iron frost-chain, but by burning heat and the long-protracted water famine. The windows of heaven are locked fast. The thirsty earth looks anguished and sorrow-stricken, daily, hourly, witnessing the torture, the death of her perishing children.

Then, wafted by unseen, unheard messengers, as in the frozen North, the fiat goes forth in the burning South. The soft touch

of the Daughter of the Mist is felt upon plant and soil, pool and streamlet. They listen to the sound of softly-falling tear-drops from the sky, and, lo! they arise, rejoicing, to regain life and vigour, as the sick from the physician, as the babe from the mother's tendance.

Once more was there joy in the broad Australian steppes and pastures, from the apple orchards of the south to the boundless ocean-plains of the far north-west, where the saltbush grows, and the myall and the mulgah, where the willowy coubah weeps over the dying streamlet, where the wild horse snorts at dawn on the lonely sandhill, where the emu stalks stately through the golden clear moonlight.

Now had arisen in good sooth for Ernest Neuchamp a day of prosperity and triumph. By every post came news of that upricing of prices which Mr. Levison had foretold, in stock and stations, in horses and in cattle, in land and in houses, in corn and in labour. This last consideration, though serious enough to the owners of sheep, in the comparatively unenlightened days which preceded the grand economy of fencing runs, was not of much weight with Ernest. His adherents were tried and trusty, and neither Charley Banks nor Jack Windsor would have abandoned him for all the gold in Ballarat and all the silver in Nevada. Piambook and Boinmaroo, incurious and taking no thought for the morrow, with the characteristic childishness of their race, dreamed of no adequate motive which should sever them from the light work and regularly-dispensed tobacco of Misser Noochum. With his own assistance they were amply sufficient for all the work of the establishment, now that the 'circle dot' cattle, thoroughly broken to the run, had taken up regular beats, and divided themselves by consent into mobs or subdivisions, each with its own leader.

Many a pleasant ride had Ernest now that all things 'had suffered,' not 'a sea-change,' but none the less an astounding metamorphosis, into 'something rich and strange.'

Daily he made long-disused excursions into the mysterious, half-unknown land of 'the Back,' only to find, after each fresh day's exploring, richer pasture, fuller watercourses, stronger, more frolicsome cattle. These last had grown and thriven on the over-abundant pasture, 'out of knowledge,' as Charley Banks averred. Again were the old triumphs and glories of a cattle-station re-enacted. Again he saw the heavy rolling droves of bullocks come panting and teeming into camp. Again he witnessed the reckless speed and practised wheel of the trained stock horses. All things, indeed, were changed.

Charley Banks was never tired of sounding the praises of the glorious season, and of the splendid fattening qualities of Rainbar, with its extraordinary variety of plant-wealth, herbs, grasses, saltbushes, clovers, every green thing, from wild carrots to crowsfoot, which the heart of man, devoted to the welfare of his herd, could desire.

'I never saw anything like those 'circle dot' cattle for laying it on,' he would say. 'They're as big again as they were. And those crawlers of Freemans'—they'll pay out and out. We've branded as many calves from 'em as will come to half the purchase money, at present prices. It will soon be time to move the fat cattle; in another month or two Rainbar will be full of 'em.'

The only persons to whom the rain had not brought joy and gladness were Freeman Brothers. These worthy yeomen began to consider that after all this hard work, as they expressed it, they had been shamefully outwitted and deceived. The travel-worn cattle-dealer, who had driven so hard a bargain with them, had turned out to be the great Abstinens Levison, no less. Their stock had been handed over to Mr. Neuchamp, with whom, doubtless, he had been in league. Now they were growing and fattening fast, prices rising faster, and not a shilling for *them*, out of it all. Then they had to wait idle on their land till November, or else lose the cash agreed on.

'Then to hand everything over—most likely for the benefit of a young fellow who knew nothing about the country—a —blessed "new chum"—hang him. The country was getting too full of the likes of him. It was enough to make a man turn digger.'

Abraham Freeman and his wife were the only contented individuals of the once peaceful co-operative community. They would have secured sufficient capital upon the payment of the coming instalments to purchase a well-improved farm in their old neighbourhood, to which they proposed immediately to return, and there spend the remainder of an unambitious existence.

'They had seen quite enough of this far-out life,' they said. 'Free-selecting here might be very well for some people; it didn't suit them. They liked a quiet place in a cool climate, where the crops grew, and the cows gave them milk all the year round—not a feast or a famine. If they had the chance, please God, they would know *next time* when they were well off.'

One afternoon Charley Banks came tearing in, displaying in triumph a provincial journal, the *Parramatta Postboy*, directed to him in unknown handwriting. Pointing to a column, headed 'Elopement extraordinary,' he commenced with great difficulty, owing to the frequency of his ejaculations and bursts of laughter, to read aloud to Mr. Neuchamp the following extract, from which it may be gathered that Mr. Windsor 'was on time,' in spite of all apparent obstacles:

It is seldom that we have to chronicle so dramatic an incident as that which has just occurred in our midst, and which was fraught with deep interest to one of our most respected residents of old standing in the neighbourhood. We refer to the sudden and wholly unexpected matrimonial arrangement made by Miss C—y W—n, the daughter of mine host of the old-established well-known family hotel, the 'Cheshire Cheese.'

It would appear that Mr. Henry Homminey, the successful Hawkesbury agriculturist, was about to lead the blushing fair one, with the full consent of the family, to the hymeneal altar, on Friday last. 'All went merry as a marriage bell,' till on Thursday evening Mr. John Windsor, cattle manager at Rainbar for Ernest Neuchamp, Esq., appeared at the 'Cheshire Cheese,' and joined the family party. He had been formerly acquainted with the bride-elect, but stated that he had merely come to offer his congratulations, and pass a pleasant hour. He was warmly welcomed, and the evening passed off successfully. At the appointed hour next morning the happy bridegroom appeared with his friends, who had mustered strongly for the occasion, but, to their dismay and disappointment, they were informed by Mr. W—n that the bride's chamber was empty, and that she had not attended the family matutinal repast. Mr. Homminey's feelings may be imagined but cannot be described. He at once started in pursuit of the fugitives, but after riding a few miles at a furious pace, his horse showed signs of distress, and he was persuaded by his personal friends to wend his steps in the direction of Richmond. Much sympathy is felt for his loss and disappointment. But, since the days of earliest classic records, the man of solid worth has occasionally been eclipsed, in the eyes of the fair, by the possessor of the more ornamental qualities with which Mr. Windsor is credited.

'Well done, Jack!' shouted Mr. Banks, as he finished the concluding editorial reflection; 'and well done, Ben Bolt! He must have polished off that hundred and eighty miles, or else Jack would never have been up to time. It's a good deal to depend on a horse's legs. Well, Carry Walton's a stunning girl, and it will be the making of Jack. He'll go as straight as a die now.'

'I must say I feel much gratified also,' assented Ernest. 'I should have been afraid of some of the old reckless spirit prevailing over him, if he had lost our friend Carry. Now I feel assured of his future prosperity. He is a fine, manly, intelligent fellow, and wants nothing but a sufficient object in life to make him put out his best energies.'

'Jack's as smart an all-round man as ever stepped,' said Mr. Banks, 'and with a real good headpiece too, though there's not much book-learning in it. He'd fight for you to the last drop of his blood, too. I know that.'

'It is well to have a faithful retainer at times,' said Mr. Neuchamp thoughtfully. 'It carries a mutual benefit, often lost sight of in these days of selfish realism.'

'How shall we manage with the cattle without him?' queried Mr. Banks.

'I must take the two black boys,' said Mr. Neuchamp, 'and you must do the best you can on the run by yourself; for business renders it absolutely necessary that I should visit Sydney.'

'I daresay I'll manage, somehow,' said Mr. Banks. 'I must get Tottie Freeman to help me, if I'm hard pushed. She's the smartest hand with cattle of the lot.'

'I do not think that arrangement would quite answer,' quoth Mr. Neuchamp gravely.

Within a fortnight after this conversation Mr. Neuchamp and his sable retainers might have been observed making the usual stages with a most satisfactory drove of fat cattle in front of them. They were not, perhaps, equal to the first lot he recollected despatching from Rainbar; but 'cattle were cattle' now, in the language of the butchers. There were plenty more coming on, and it was not thought advisable to wait longer for the ultimate 'topping up' of the beeves. They were good enough. The demand was prodigious; and purchasers did not make half the critical objections that were used in the old days, when cattle were not half the price.

In the appointed time the important draft reached Sydney, and before Mr. Neuchamp could look round, it seemed to him, they were snapped up at eight-pounds-ten a head, no allusions made to 'rough cattle,' or 'very plain on the back,' 'old cows,' 'light weights,' or any of the usual strong depreciations customary on former occasions. No; a new era seemed to have set in. All was right as long as the count was accurate. So satisfactory was the settling that Mr. Neuchamp at once wrote to Charley Banks to muster and send down another draft, even if he *had* to put Tottie Freeman in charge of Rainbar while he was on the road.

Then came the immediate rush to the office of Frankston and Co., and a meeting with old Paul, that made up for much of enforced privation and protracted self-denial.

'My dear boy! most glad to see you, at last; thought that we should never see your face again. Knew you couldn't come before the rain did. Can't leave the ship until tide serves and the wind's fair. But *now* the voyage is over, first mate's in charge of the ship, and the skipper can put on his long-shore toggery and cruise for a spell. Of course you're on your way out to dine with us?'

Ernest mentioned that, presuming upon old acquaintance, such had been his intention.

'Antonia will be ever so glad to see you; but she must tell you all the news herself. You will find your cousin at Morahmee. She and Antonia are wonderful friends—that is—'

'That is,' said Ernest, completing Paul's sentence, over which the worthy merchant appeared to hesitate somewhat—'that is, as close as two people very widely dissimilar in taste and temperament can ever be.'

'Perhaps there *may* be a slightly different way of looking at things, and so on,' said his old friend cautiously; 'but all crafts are not built out of the same sort of timber, or on the same lines. Some are oak, some of American pine, some of teak, some of white gum; some with a smart shear, some with

a good allowance of beam; and they can't be altered over much. As the keel's laid down, so the boat's bound to float.'

'H—m!' replied Ernest thoughtfully, 'that involves a large question—several large questions, in fact. Good-bye for the present.'

How many memories crowded upon the brain of Ernest Neuchamp as he once more trod the massive sandstone flags underneath the portico of the verandah at Morahmee! The freshly raked gravel walks, the boscage of glowing green which formed the living walls of the renovated shrubberies, the well-remembered murmur of the low-toned restless surge, the odour of the unchanged deep, all these sharply contrasted sights and sounds after his weary sojourn in the desert composed for him a page of Boccaccio, framed a panel of Watteau-painting. He was a knight in an enchanted Armida garden. And as Antonia, freshly attired in evening dress, radiant with unmistakable welcome, appeared to greet him on the threshold of the open door, he felt as if the knight who had done his devoir was about to receive the traditional guerdon, so necessary to the perfect equilibrium of the world of chivalry and romance.

'Welcome from Palestine!' she said, unconsciously following out his train of thought, as she ran forward and clasped him by the hand. 'I don't know whether one can call any part of the bush the Holy Land; but you have been away quite long enough to have gone there. Had you vowed a vow never to come back till rain fell? People may stay away too long sometimes.' Here she gazed at Ernest with a long, searching, humbled gaze, which suddenly brightened as when the summer cloud catches the partially obscured sunray. 'But here is Augusta, coming to ask you if Rainbar won't be swallowed up in a second deluge now that the drought has broken up, as she is credibly informed is always the case in Australia!' A mischievous twinkle in her mirthful eye informed Ernest that his cousin's peculiarities had been accurately measured by the prepossessing reviewer before him.

As Miss Neuchamp, also attired in full evening costume, approached, while not far behind, with the air of a confirmed *habitué*, sauntered Mr. Jermyn Croker, Ernest thought he had never seen that young lady look to greater advantage. Something had evidently occurred with power to revive an attention to the details of dress which had been suffered of late to lie in abeyance. There was also a novel expression of not unbecoming doubt upon her resolute features which Ernest had never observed before. It soon appeared, however, that her essential characteristics were unchanged.

'I am truly glad to see you, my dear Ernest,' she said, offering him her cheek with proper cousinly coolness. 'I hear that a beneficial change has taken place in your shocking climate. Mr. Croker says that prices have risen to their

outside limit, and cannot possibly last. Of course you will sell out at once and go home?’

‘Of course I shall do no such thing,’ returned Ernest, with such unusual animation that Antonia could not help smiling. ‘I should consider it most ungrateful, as well as impolitic, to quit the land which has already done much for me, and may possibly do more.’

‘Well done, Ernest, my boy!’ said Mr. Frankston, who had just joined the party. ‘Never quit the ship that has weathered the storm with you while a plank is left in her. Now that we have our country filled with the sweepings of every port under the sun, we want the captain and first officer to act like men, and show the stuff they’re made of.’

‘I take quite a different view of my duty to Jermyn Croker, about whom I have felt much anxiety of late,’ drawled out that gentleman. ‘I see before me a chance of selling out at an absurdly high price, and taking my passage by next mail for one of the few countries that is worth living in. A madman might neglect such an opportunity for the sake of a few thousand roughs scrambling for gold at California, or Ballarat, but not Jermyn Croker, if I know him.’

‘And suppose stock rise higher still?’ queried Mr. Frankston, smiling at the magnificent dogmatism of his unsentimental friend.

‘My dear Frankston, how a man of your age and experience can so blind himself to the real state of affairs is a marvel to me. Cattle *can’t* rise. Five pounds all round for young and old on the station is a price never before reached in Australia. You *must* see the crash that is coming. Really, now, without humbug, don’t you know that there will be a change before Christmas?’

‘So there will,’ answered Paul, ‘but it will be for the better. We have not half the stock in the country to feed the great multitude that are, even now, on the sea. But if you *will* sell, you might give me the offer.’

‘Sold out of every hoof to Parklands this morning!’ answered Mr. Croker, looking round with a triumphant air. ‘I was standing on the club steps before breakfast when he came in from the northern steamer, and made me an offer before he got out of his hansom.’

‘And you took it?’

‘Took it? of course. We went into the library, where he wrote me out a cheque then and there for twenty thousand pounds, and I gave him the delivery note. Booroo-booroo and Chatsworth, with four thousand head of cattle, taken, without muster, by the book, everything given in. Something like a sale, wasn’t it?’

‘First-rate for some one—I don’t say who. But I’ll take three to one that Parklands knocks five thousand pounds profit out of it before the year is over.’

'I take you, provided he doesn't sell to Neuchamp,' answered Croker. 'I must say I think one bargain with him ought to satisfy any man, except Selmore.'

'I'll bet you a level hundred,' said Paul, a little quickly, 'that in five years Ernest here will be able to buy you up—horse, foot, and dragoons—without feeling the amount.'

'Particularly if he has the invaluable aid and counsel of Paul Frankston,' sneered Mr. Jermyn Croker. 'However, I shan't be here to see, as I never intend to cross the Nepean again, or to see Sydney Heads except in an engraving.'

'We'll all go and see you off,' said Antonia, who with Ernest suddenly appeared as if they had not been listening to the conversation, which indeed they had not, but had taken a quiet walk down 'an alley Titanic' with glorious araucarias. 'But whoever goes or stays, we must have dinner. I really *do* believe that it's past seven o'clock.'

At this terrible announcement Paul's ever robust punctuality asserted itself with a rebound. Seizing upon the fair Augusta he hurried her to the dining-room, where all conversation bordering upon business was banished for the present.

After the ladies had retired, the fascinating topic of the changed social aspect of the country since the gold crop had alternated with those of wheat, maize, wool, and tallow, which formerly absorbed so large a share of interest, again came uppermost. Upon this point Mr. Croker was grandly didactic.

'Mark my words, Frankston,' said he, throwing himself back in his chair, 'in two years you will see this country a perfect hell upon earth! What's to hinder it? Even now there's hardly a shepherd to be got; people are talking of turning their sheep loose—that, of course, means ruin to wool-growing. Cattle will soon overtake the temporary demand; all the new buyers—nothing personal intended, Neuchamp—will be ruined. Tallow will fall directly the Russians have settled their difficulty. I know this from private sources. Flour will be a hundred pounds a ton again; of course there will be no ploughing for want of hands. These digger fellows will take to cutting their own throats first, and when in good practice those of the propertied classes for a change; and lastly, you'll have universal suffrage. The scum will be uppermost, and you'll end suitably with an unparalleled Jacquerie.'

Mr. Croker, having completed this pleasing patriotic sketch, filled his glass and looked round with the air of a man who had just demonstrated to inquiring youth that two and two make four.

'Australia was always a beastly hole,' he continued; 'but really, I think, when—even before—it comes to what I have outlined, it will cease to be fit for a gentleman to live in.'

'You must pardon me for expressing a directly contrary opinion,' replied Ernest, who had been gradually girding himself up to answer Mr. Croker according to his humour. 'I

hold that this is precisely the time, and these are the exact circumstances, which render it a point of honour for every gentleman who has past or present interest in the land to live in it, to stand by his colours and lead his regiment in the battle which is so imminent. Now is the time for those who have felt or asserted an interest in this glorious last-discovered Eldorado, far down in the list of English provinces which have a way of changing into nations, to uphold with all the manhood that is in them her righteous laws, her goodly customs, her pure yet untrammelled liberty. In my mind, he who takes advantage of the rise in prices to quit Australia for ever at this hour of her social need, deserts his duty, abandons his post, and confesses himself to be less a true colonist than a sordid huckster !'

As Mr. Neuchamp delivered himself of this perhaps slightly coloured estimate of the duty of a pastoral tenant, unheeding of the implied rebuke to the last speaker, he raised his head and confronted the company with the air of the captain of a sinking ship who has vowed to stand by her while a plank floats.

Jermyn Croker coloured, but did not immediately reply, while the host took occasion to interfere, as became his position of mediator between over-hasty disputants.

'I think you are both a little beyond the mark,' he said ; ' if you will allow me, who have lived here since Sydney was a small seaside village, to give you my ideas. No doubt, as Croker says, we shall have a queer crew, with every kind of lubber and every known sort of blackguard to deal with. But what of that ? Discipline has always been kept up in old New South Wales,—in times, too, when matters looked black enough. The same men, or their sons, are here now who showed themselves equal to the occasion before. We have Old England at our backs ; and though she doesn't bother us with much advice or short leading strings, she has a ship or two and a regiment left which are at the service of any of her colonies when need is.'

'Every country where gold has been discovered up to this time has gradually degenerated and come to grief,' asserted Croker, recovering from his dissatisfied silence ; 'not that much degeneration is possible here.'

'You are thinking of the Spaniards, the Mexicans, and so on,' said Paul. 'I've been among them, and know all about their ways. They are not so much worse than other people. But even so : English people have always managed to govern themselves under all circumstances, and will again, I venture to bet.'

'I came out here thinking Australia a good place to make money. I always knew England was a good place to spend it in,' averred Mr. Croker. 'I'm a man of few ideas, I confess. But I have stuck to these few, and I think I see my way.'

'I suppose we all do,' said Mr. Frankston; 'but some have more luck or better eyesight than others. Our friend Levison wouldn't make a bad man at the "look-out" in dirty weather, eh, Ernest? What do you think of him, Croker?'

'Think? why, that he's an immensely overrated man; he has made a few hits by straightforward blundering and kept what he has got. I give him credit for that. But who's to know whether all this station property that stands in his name is *really* his? The banks may have the lion's share for all anybody knows.'

'Highly probable,' assented Ernest, with fierce sarcasm; 'and Levison's steady prophecy that the season was going to break just before it did was an accidental guess! His purchasing stock, stations, and town property for the rise, which no one else believed in, was a chance hit! His uniformly good sales when every one else was holding! His large purchases when all the world was selling! His unostentatious gifts, at the rate of two to a thousand pounds, to church buildings were unredeemed parsimony! His advice to me to buy and his actual purchases of stock for my benefit, every pound invested in which has furnished a profit of ten, were selfish mistakes! You must excuse me, Croker, for saying that I think you have reared a larger crop of prejudices in Australia than any man I have seen here.'

'It's a fine climate!' quoth Paul; 'everything grows and develops; even experience, like Madeira in the voyage round the Cape, ripens twice as fast here as anywhere else. A white-washer, Croker? I really believe this is a bottle of the Manzanares you prefer, and we'll join the ladies, which means, adjourn to the verandah.'

If Happiness, at any period or season, did dwell upon the earth, she must have sojourned, about the month of September 185—, so near to the New Holland Club, so near to the person of Ernest Neuchamp, as to have been occasionally visible to the naked eye. Had a company of *savans* been told off to view the goddess, as in the far less important matter of the transit of Venus, success had been certain. But society never recognises its real wonders—its absolute and imperious miracles. Therefore for a little space that earthly maid glorified the dwelling and the precincts of the untrammelled, rejoicing, successful proprietor. She sat by Mr. Neuchamp at the daintily prepared refectations of the club, and gave an added flavour to his moderate but intense enjoyment of viand and vintage, so wondrous in variety, so miraculous of aroma, after his long endurance of the unpalatable monotony of the Rainbar cuisine. She whispered in the mystic tones of the many-voiced sea-breezes, as they murmured around his steps when, with Antonia at his side, he roamed through the mimic woods of Morahmee, or gazed with never-ending contemplative joy on the pale

moon's silver tracery o'er wave and strand. She rose with him in the joyous morn, telling him the ever-welcome tale that all cause for anxiety had fled, that a new ukase had gone forth, bringing unmixed joy to every man of his order, always excepting the sheepholders and Jermyn Croker. She sat behind him, on Osmund, displacing 'the sad companion ghastly pale' even 'atira Cura,' who had been the occupant of a croup seat on that gallant steed for many a day. Once more the rattle of flying hoofs was heard upon the sandy downs and red hill-roads which near Bondi's ceaseless surge overlook the city's mingled mass, the ocean's fresh eternal glory. In this season of joy and pride—the natural and becoming pride of him who has suffered and struggled, waited and warred for no mean reward, which at length he has been permitted to grasp—the bright goddess smiled on every act, thought, and hope of Ernest Neuchamp. In that fair brief bygone day of unalloyed triumph, of unclouded hope, it is a truth most absolute and indisputable that she stood by his side in serene and awful beauty ; but, like her austere sister of old who cried aloud in the streets to a heedless generation, 'no man regarded her.'

Through all this halcyon time no definite pledge or vow had passed between him and the woman whom he had slowly, but with all the force of an inflexibly tenacious nature, come to consider as the embodied essence of that mysterious complement to man's nature, at once the vital necessity, the crowning glory of this mortal state, the vision of female perfection ! Proud, fastidious, a searcher after ideals, prone to postpone the irrevocable decision by which man's fate here below is for ever sealed, he was now face to face with Destiny. Even now he felt so utterly fascinated, so supremely content with the graduated intimacies of which the daily process which draws two human hearts together into indescribable union is composed, so charmed with the undreamed-of treasures of mind and heart which each fresh casket unlocked displayed to his gaze, that he felt no desire to change the mode of bliss. Why hurry to an end this sojourn in the land of Faerye, while the bridle-reins of the Queen of Elf-land and her troop were ringing still through the haunted woods, while feast and tournament still went merrily on, while stream and emerald turf and bosky glade were still touched with the glory of successful love, while the glamour still held sea and sky and far empurpled mounts, upon which, let but once the knell of disenchantment sound, no mortal may again gaze *while life endures* ?

During all this time of joy and consolation Mr. Neuchamp had regular advices from his lieutenant, Charley Banks. That young gentleman complained piteously of his lonely state and solitary lodging in the wilderness, for which nothing compensated, it would appear, but the increasing beauty of the season (pastorally considered) and an occasional gossip with Tottie Freeman.

Now that the rain had found out the way to salt-bush land, there seemed to be but little variety of weather. It rained every other day, sometimes for nearly a week, incredible to relate, without stopping. The creeks were full, the flats were soaked, spongy, and knee-deep in clover. The river was high, had come down 'a banker,' and any further rainfall at the head waters, or even the melting of the snow, might bring down a flood such as the dwellers in those parts had not seen for many a day. The Freemans were uncomfortable enough. They had found that their huts and fencing had been placed on land too low for comfort in a wet season, and even for safety if the threatened floods rose higher than usual.

In November, the third spring month of the Australians, another despatch of greater weight and importance reached Mr. Neuchamp, who apparently was not hasting to quit the land of French cooks and Italian singers, of pleasant day saunterings, of cheerful lunch parties, and moonlight rambles by the murmuring sea. Mr. Banks had the distinguished honour of entertaining Mr. Levison, but lately returned from Melbourne, and engaged in starting two or three thousand head of fat cattle for that market. He had come round by Rainbar, he said, on purpose to take delivery of the Freemans' land, but he, Charley Banks, thought it more likely that he wanted to see old 'BI' (who looked splendid, with a crest like a lion), and whom he rode away in triumph. He handed over the deeds of all the Freemans' conditional purchases to him to give to Mr. Neuchamp, saying that he hoped he wouldn't do that sort of thing again, as he might not come out of it right another time.

Mr. Banks further related that he had volunteered as his deliberate opinion, from what he had noticed about the Victorian gold mines, that the yield of gold would last many years, during which time stock would continue to be high in price, although there might be temporary depressions. As a consequence of which state of things, the sooner every one bought all the store stock they could lay hands on the better. "'My word,'" he said, "it was a lucky drop-in—not for them though—that I picked you up those Freeman cattle, not to speak of the 'circle dots.' There will be no more eight-and-sixpenny store cattle, or fifteen-bob ones either—two pounds for cows, and fifty shillings and three pounds for good steers and bullocks will be more like it, and they will pay at that price too. But what I want you to tell Mr. Neuchamp is this. I'd write to him but I'm in a hurry off, and you can do it quite as well, if you're careful and attend to what I tell you.

"'I've just had information that the Sydney people who have got the agency of the Mildool run, that joins you, are going to sell. They've got it into their wise heads that cattle have seen their top, because they're worth five pounds all round, that is, with stations; and because they're old-fashioned Sydney-siders

that never heard of such a price since the days when they used to bring buffaloes from India.

"They believe that Victoria is choke-full of Yankees and diggers, stowaways and emigrants, and that the whole thing will 'bust up' directly, and let down prices everywhere to what they were before the gold.

"People that travel, and keep their eyes open, know what foolishness all this sort of thing is. A regular Sydney man thinks all Victorians are blowers and speculators. A regular Victorian thinks all Sydney men are old-fashioned, slow prigs who wouldn't spend a guinea to save five pounds. The truth is pretty near the middle. Don't you stick at home all your life, like a mallee scrubber, that has only one dart, on the plain and back to his scrub, and then you won't run away with the notion that because a man is born on one side of a river and not on the other, he ain't as clever, or as sensible, or as good a hand at making money or saving it, as you are. It's only country-bred, country-reared folks that think that way.

"What I want you to tell the boss is this. He'd better set old Paul Frankston to get a quiet offer of this Mildool with four thousand odd head—it will carry about seven or eight—and if they'll take four-fifteen or five pound all round, ram 'em with it at once. Tell Neuchamp he can send that native chap to manage it, and it will be the best day's work he's done for some time. Tell him Ab. Levison said so. Good-bye. You take a run down to Melbourne next chance you get of a holiday, and don't stay out here till you get the Darling rot. Good-bye."

'And so he cantered off on old 'BL.' Levison don't go in for much talk in a general way, but when he once begins he don't leave off so easy. I thought he was going to talk all night, and so lose a day. But catch him at that. I think I've told you every word he said, for I went and wrote it down as soon as he went away.'

So far Mr. Banks. Upon the receipt of his artless missive, Ernest went at once to Paul Frankston, and communicated to him the substance of the message of Mr. Levison.

'This is putting on the pot, my dear boy,' said he. 'If anything happens to shake stock, Rainbar and Mildool will tumble down like a house of cards. But now the wind is dead fair, and we may venture on studding-sails—crowd on below and aloft. I back Levison's opinion that it is the right time to buy before Sticker and Pugsley's notion that it is the right time to sell.'

'What sort of terms do you think they will require?' asked Ernest, who was fired with the idea of consolidating into one magnificent property the two crack cattle runs of Rainbar and Mildool, the latter a grandly watered, splendidly grassed station, but wofully mismanaged according to old custom.

'Half cash at least, and not very long dated bills either,'

said Paul, 'but we can manage the cash on your security, as your name now stands high in the money market. As to the bills, tell them that I will endorse them. They won't make any objection then.'

'How much heavier is the load of my obligations to you to become?' asked Ernest. 'I feel as if I should never live to free myself from the debt I owe you already.'

'Don't trouble yourself, my dear boy,' said the liberal endorser. 'If things go well, nothing's easier for you than to clear off every stiver of debt. See how you have been able to pay off Levison, principal and interest, out of that last lot of cattle, without a shade of difficulty. If the rise takes place which Levison and I and some more of us anticipate, why you, I, and he stand to win something very respectable. You can then give us all a cheque for the amount advanced, and the whole thing is over and finished. Until the drought broke up, I don't deny that we all had to be very close-hauled, and lay to a good deal from time to time; but now, with bullocks eight pounds a head, and fat sheep ten shillings—wool up too, and real property rising, not to mention the shipping trade doubling every month, why, if we can't clap on sail, my boy, we never can, and what the ship can't carry she may drag.'

The old man looked so thoroughly convinced of the truth of his convictions as he spoke, with the kindling eye and elevated visage of one resolved upon a hazardous but honourable enterprise, that Ernest Neuchamp, always prone to be influenced by contagious exaltation of sentiment, caught fire from his ardent mien and tone.

'Well, so be it,' he said; 'I am content to sink or swim in the same boat with you and yours. We have Ab. Levison for a pilot, and he knows all the rocks and soundings of the pastoral deep sea from Penrith to Carpentaria, I should say. As you say there's a time for all things, I think this is the time to back one's opinion in reason and moderation. I will go and confront the agents for Mildool.'

Messrs. Sticker and Pugsley were steady-going, precise men of business of the old school. As stock and station agents they had always steadily set their faces against all outlay except for the merest necessities of life. Bred to their business in the old times when stock were plentiful, labour cheap, and cash extremely hard to lay hold of in any shape or form, they struggled desperately against these new-fangled notions of 'throwing away money uselessly,' as they termed the comparatively large outlay which they occasionally heard of upon dams, wells, fencing, woolsheds, and washpens. Large profits had been made in the good old times, when such speculations would have gone nigh to have furnished a warrant *de lunatico inquirendo*. They did not see how it was all to be repaid. They doubted the management which comprehended such sinful extravagance; and they proposed to continue their time-

honoured system, which made it imperative upon all stockholders who were unlucky enough to be in debt to them, to spend nothing, to live upon shepherds' wages, and not to think of coming to town until times improved.

One wonders if it ever occurred to these snug comfort-living cits, as daily they drove home to pleasant villas and luxurious surroundings—did it ever occur to them, after the second glass of old port, to what a life of wretchedness, solitude, and sordid surroundings their griping parsimony was condemning the unlucky exile from civilisation, who was hopelessly chained to their ledger? For him no beeswing port, no claret of Bordeaux. He drank his 'Jack the Painter' tea milkless, most probably, and flavoured with blackest sugar, occasionally stimulating his ideality with ration rum or villainous dark brandy. Though his the brain that planned, the hand that carried out long desert wayfarings of exploration—long, toilsome drudgeries of stock travelling to lone untrodden wilds; his the frame that withered, the eye that dimmed, the health that failed, the blood that flowed, ere the process of colonising, progression, of commercial extension was complete. Thus land was occupied, villages sprang up, inter-communication was established, and the wilderness subdued. All the magnificent results of civilisation were brought about over territories of incredible area by the intelligence, enterprise, and energy of one individual. And he, too often, when the battle was won, the standard hoisted, and the multitude pouring over the breach, found himself a beggared and a broken man.

Mr. Neuchamp, after due preliminaries, entered the office of Messrs. Sticker and Pugsley, with whom he had an interview by no means of a disagreeable character. The senior partner, an elderly, gray-haired personage, showed much of the formal politeness which is commonly thought to distinguish the gentleman of 'the old school.' He received Ernest courteously, begged that he would take a chair, alluded to the weather, deplored the arrival of the mosquitoes, to which the rain and the spring in conjunction had been jointly favourable, requested to know whom he had the honour of receiving, and finally desired information as to the particular mode in which he could be of service to him.

'I have been informed,' said Ernest, 'that your firm are agents for the Mildool station, and that it is in the market. I have come to request that you will put it under offer to me, as I have some intention of purchasing a property of that sort.'

'We have not as yet advertised it,' replied Mr. Sticker; 'still, you have been rightly informed that the station and stock are for sale. But we do not think of offering it upon the usual terms; our own opinion is, I do not disguise it from you, that present prices will not last. I have been many years in the colony, and such is my belief. Mr. Pugsley, whose opinion of the permanence of present high rates is better than mine, also

believes that, with the properties entrusted to us, it is as well to be safe, and to take advantage of an opportunity that may never occur again. Our terms for Mildool are briefly these: We offer four thousand head of mixed cattle, above six months old, with, of course, the MQ brand, at five pounds per head, everything given in. I am informed that the improvements are scanty and in bad repair; there are twenty stock horses, and a team of bullocks and dray, two huts, and a stockyard. But, perhaps, you know the property, and the appearance of the buildings.'

'The huts *are* old and bad,' said Ernest, smiling; 'and as for the stockyard, the Mildool stockmen have for the last few years brought their cattle to our yard for safety, as you could kick down the Mildool yard anywhere. But what is your idea of terms?'

'Half cash, and the balance in approved bills, at one and two years, secured upon the stock and station.'

'Rather stiff,' said Ernest; 'but will you put the offer in writing, and leave it open for a week? I will before that time give you a decided answer.'

Mr. Sticker would have much pleasure in doing so. As Ernest preferred to wait for the important document, it was soon prepared, and he finally marched away with a fortune, as it turned out (fate and opportunity are queer things), in his waistcoat pocket. He was not too quick in his conditional annexation of this desirable territory. Ten minutes afterwards Mr. Hardy Baldacre dashed into the office on the same errand, quitting it with a curse which shocked Mr. Sticker, and provoked Mr. Pugsley, who was young and athletic, to inform him that he must not suppose that his money provided him the permission to be rude, though it did procure him consideration far beyond his deserts. Altogether, Mr. Baldacre felt as if his brandy-and-soda had been scarcely so efficacious as usual that morning.

When Mr. Neuchamp produced this small but important document to Paul Frankston, that commercial mentor rubbed his hands with unconcealed satisfaction.

'You've got 'em, Ernest, my boy, hard and fast. I believe you might make a pound a head, say four thousand pounds out of it, in a month. Sticker is a good man, according to his light, and Pug's a sharp fellow. But they don't see, and won't see, the signs of the times. They're always remembering the old boiling-down days, and they fancy that the least change in markets will send us back to it. You did right to get the offer in writing, and for a deferred time. We'll keep it a day or two, and then you shall go and accept the terms like a man.'

'But how about the money?' inquired Mr. Neuchamp with a shade of natural anxiety. 'Twenty thousand pounds are no nutshells, however little it may sound in these extravagant days.'

'Look here,' said Paul, 'find this ten thousand down; any agent will give you five thousand on the security of your year's draft of fat stock from the two runs; it will come to more, I dare say, but we must be as careful as we can. I think that you will have to give a mortgage over Rainbar and Mildool—a second one—and then you may draw a cheque for the ten thousand as soon as you like.'

'And what about the "approved" bills?'

'Well, the day after to-morrow you can go to old Sticker and pay him the half cash. I'll put the cash part of it through; ask him to make out the bills, with interest added at 8 per cent; bring them to me, and I will put a name on the back which will render them legal tender, whatever may come of them after.'

'The old story since I came to Australia,' said Ernest. 'It seems that I can do nothing without your advice; and that your help follows me as a natural consequence—whatever I do, and whatever I buy.'

'Well, if this shot turns out badly,' said Paul, 'I'll promise not to *back your bills any more*. Will that satisfy you? But Levison seems quite determined, "just this once," as the children say, and I generally take his tip if I see a chance. I think our money is on the right horse.'

'I hope so,' said Ernest, thinking, respectfully, of the lovely condition of Rainbar at the moment, and fearing lest, by any financial legerdemain, it might be taken away from him in time to come.

Before the week was ended, during which the offer of Mildool was open for his acceptance, Mr. Neuchamp had the satisfaction of handing Mr. Sticker a cheque for ten thousand pounds, which he had been obligingly permitted by his banker to draw against certain securities, and also two bills, with interest added at the rate of 8 per cent, for the balance. Upon which somewhat important documents being well scanned and examined, and further submitted to Mr. Pugsley, who was on that occasion introduced, Ernest received an order to receive delivery of the Mildool station, having twenty-four miles frontage to the river, and going thirty miles back, with four thousand head of cattle, more or less, depasturing thereon, the same to be mustered and counted over in six weeks; any cattle deficient to be paid for by Sticker and Pugsley, at the rate of two-pounds-ten per head, and all cattle in excess to be taken by the purchaser at that price. When this transaction was concluded—on paper, Mr. Neuchamp began to realise that he was having pastoral greatness thrust upon him.

Speculation is a grandly exciting occupation, when all goes well. When the bark is launched, mayhap with tremulous hope, perchance with the reckless pride of youth, there is a wondrously intoxicating triumph in noting the gradual, ever-deep, engine-flowing tide, the steady, favourable gale before

which the galley which carried Cæsar and his fortunes 'walks the waters like a thing of life,' and finally conveys the illustrious freight to one of the fair havens of the gracious goddess Success. A triumph is decreed to Cæsar. Immediately Cæsar's critics become bland, his enemies fangless, his friends are pacified—*they* are always the most difficult personages to assuage; his detractors go and detract from others; his creditors burn incense before him; his feminine acquaintances dress at him, talk at him, sing at him, and *look* at him—oh! so differently.

Cæsar needs all of his unusually powerful mental attributes if he does not become abominably conceited, and straightway refer the kindness of circumstance to his own inherent talent for calculation and brilliant combination. Let him haste to place yet higher stakes upon the tables, and after the usual fluctuation and flattery of the Fiend, he arises one day ruined, undone, and despised by himself, neglected by others.

The fate of Ernest Neuchamp could never thus be told. Naturally too prudent in pecuniary matters to go much further than he had good warrant for, he was even alarmed at his present comparatively risky position. But he had adopted the advice of his best friend, whose former counsels had been accurately borne out in successful practice. He had taken time to consider. Wiser heads than his own were committed to the same results; and he was, according to his custom, prepared to dismiss anxiety, and to await the issue.

Nor was he minded on this account to cut short his stay in Sydney. He determined, in accordance with his own feelings and Mr. Levison's suggestion, to give the management of the new station to his faithful henchman Jack Windsor, who, now that he was married and settled, would be all the better fitted to undertake a position of responsibility. As for Charley Banks, he should retain him as general manager of Rainbar. He ought not even to live there always himself. If it kept on raining and elevating the fat cattle market *ad infinitum*, the place could be managed with a 'long arm.' No reason to bury himself there for ever. He might even run home to England for a year or so.

Meanwhile it was not unpleasant to be congratulated at the club upon his improved prospects, and his spirited purchase of so extensive and well-known a property as Mildool. He commenced to divide the honour of rapid operation with Mr. Parklands, and found from day to day offers awaiting him of desirable properties situated north, south, east, and west, with any quantity and variety of stock, and of every sort and description of climate and 'country.' Mr. Parklands, to the ineffable disgust of Jermyn Croker, had already sold Booroo-booroo and Chatsworth at a profit of six thousand pounds, which Mr. Croker said he regarded as being taken out of his pocket, so to speak. Parklands had, moreover, the coolness to say that, if it

had been worth his while to keep two such small stations on hand for a longer time, he could have made ten thousand as easily as the six. Mr. Croker objected to the claret and cookery more pointedly than usual that day, and the committee and the house steward had an evil time of it ; that is, as far as contemptuous reference may have affected them.

Mr. Parklands, now truly in his element, indulged his fancy for unlimited speculation and locomotion to the fullest extent. He filled the Melbourne markets with store stock and fat stock, horses and sheep, working bullocks and milch cows, every possible variety of animal, except goats and swine. It was asserted that he *did* consider the nanny question, and calculated roughly whether a steamer load of those miniature milchers would not pay decently. He ransacked Tasmania for oats, palings, and jam, and, no doubt, would have largely imported that other interesting product, of which the sister island has always yielded so bounteous a supply, could he have seen his way to a clearing-off sale when he landed the cargo. Finally, he dashed off to Adelaide for a slap at copper, and having taken a contract for 'ship cattle' for New Zealand, paused, like another Alexander, awaiting the discovery of fresh colonies in which he might revel in still more colossal operations.

CHAPTER XXIX

A LETTER had been despatched to Mr. Windsor's address, of which his master had knowledge, requesting him to proceed to Sydney upon important business. Accordingly, at an early hour next day he presented himself at the club steps and greeted his employer with a subdued air of satisfaction, as if doubtful how far his recent decided action had met with approval.

'I am very glad to see you, John,' said Mr. Neuchamp; 'I hope Mrs. Windsor is well. I congratulate you both heartily. Yours was a spirited plan, and your success in the carrying out, or rather the carrying off, of my old friend Carry most enviable. I was afraid there might be obstacles. How did you arrange it all? Suppose you walk over to the Domain with me, and tell me all about it.'

Mr. Windsor, much doubting if this were the important business upon which he had been summoned to town, but not unwilling to relate the tale of his victory to so sympathising an auditor as he knew his master to be, thus commenced—

'You know, sir, I had a tightish ride to get over before I caught the mail. I felt very queer, I tell you, as if I didn't meet that identical coach I should never get down in time. I was horrid frightened every time I thought about it, there's no mistake. I saved Ben Bolt as much as I could the first day and bandaged his legs when I got to the stable late at night. I did eighty miles that day, and durstn't go farther for fear I might crack him at the first burst. I was up with the stars and fed him. I didn't sleep much, you're sure, and at three in the morning I was off for a hundred mile ride! and that heat, *a man's life!* Mine wouldn't have mattered much afterwards, if I'd lost. I didn't feel gay just then, and I thought Ben Bolt walked out rather stiff. However, he put his ears back, and switched his tail sideways, as I mounted. That was a good sign. It was all plains, of course, soft, sandy road—couldn't be beat for smoothness, and firm, too. I kept him going in a steady hand-gallop, pulling him up only now and again during the forenoon. In the middle of the day I stopped for three

good hours, gave him a middling feed—not too much, and got a little water ; but he got a real good strapping. I stood over the feller doing it, and gave him half-a-crown.

‘I’d done fifty miles between three and eleven—I wasn’t going fast, you see—but of course the second fifty makes all the difference. I began to be afraid he was too big. The feed at Rainbar was awfully good, you know, sir ; but as luck would have it, I’d given him some stiffish days after the farthest out cattle, and that had hardened him a bit.

‘About two o’clock I cleared out again ; saddled him myself ; saw that his back was all right, and felt his legs, which were as cool and clean as if he hadn’t gone a yard. I had the second fifty to do before twelve at night. That was the time the coach passed, and hardly waited a moment, either.

‘Off again, and I kept on steady at first, trusting to six miles an hour to do it in, and something to spare ; but every now and again I kept thinking, thinking, suppose he goes lame all of a sudden ! suppose he jacks up ! suppose he falls, puts his foot into a hole, or anything—rolls over me and gallops off, all the men in the world wouldn’t catch him ! suppose I’m stopped by bushrangers—Red Cap’s out, you know ;—why don’t they hang every scoundrel that turns out the moment he hoists his flag ?’

‘Because they might reform, John,’ mildly interposed Mr. Neuchamp.

‘No fear—that is, mostly, sir,’ continued Jack apologetically ; ‘but they wouldn’t have had the heart to stop me ; and besides, I expect I could have dusted any of ’em with Ben.

‘Well, bushrangers or not, I got within twenty miles of Boree ; and then my head got so full of fancies, that I settled to make a call on Ben Bolt, and do it in two hours. Suppose the coach was earlier than usual ! No passengers, or only some young squatter, who wanted to go faster and to stop nowhere—and tipped the driver ! I’ve seen these things done before now.

‘So I took the old horse by the head, gave him a hustle and a pull, and, by George, if you’ll believe me, sir, he went away with his mouth open, as if he hadn’t only been out to the Back Lake. The sun was down then, and the night air was coolish. But I knew the track well, and as we sailed along, Ben Bolt giving a kind of snort every now and then, same as he used to do when he didn’t know the place he was going to, I felt that I had the field beat, and the race as good as won. I thought I could see Carry a-beckonin’ to me at the winning-post. I hardly think I pulled up three times, I felt that eager, and bound to win or die, before I saw the lights of the Boree Inn, and the coach stables across the plain.

“Has the coach from down the river come in yet, Joe ?” says I to the ostler, trembling all over.

“No, nor won’t be this hours yet ; you needn’t have rode so fast.”

"I couldn't afford to be late," says I. "Lend us a rug while I cool my old horse a bit. He's carried me well this day, if he never does another."

'Ben didn't look beat—nor yet half beat. My belief is he could have done another twenty or thirty miles without cracking up. But a hundred miles is a hundred miles, and no foolish ride, even in this country where horses are as plenty as wallabies, such as they are, so I did my best for him. I let him rinse his mouth, and then I walked him up and down, with the rug on, for a solid hour. Of course he broke out at first, but he gradually dried and come all right. Before the coach started with me on board, he was doing nicely for the night, littered down (for we foraged some straw out of the bottled ale casks) and eating his feed just as he would after a longish day's muster out back at Rainbar.'

'I am very glad he carried you so well, John,' said Mr. Neuchamp, at the conclusion of this antipodean Turpin's ride; 'but how did you speed in the last and most momentous stage?'

'Oh, *that* was easy drafting enough,' replied Mr. Windsor, who, apparently, had considered that portion of his matrimonial adventure which depended upon horse-flesh as the really important and exciting part of the transaction. 'I was safe and sound in Parramatta on the Thursday afternoon. I heard enough about the grand wedding for next day—but I never let on. Said I was off by sea to Queensland to look at some store cattle, and hired a trap, with a fairish horse, and a boy to mind it, which I drove down to the cross-roads, just about a mile from the "Cheshire Cheese." There was an old woodcutter's hut just inside the fence at the corner. So I left the boy there, and told him to hold the horse among the trees, and not to go away till I came—if it wasn't till dinner-time to-morrow. Of course, I squared him right. He was sharp enough; them Parramatta boys mostly are.'

'Down I goes to the old house, and marched in quite free and pleasant like, to spend the evening for the sake of old times. There was Carry looking half dull, half desperate, like a mountain filly three days in the pound—as I told her afterwards—though she was among her own people, in a manner of speaking.'

'There was Homminey, and some other Hawkesbury chaps, full of their jokes and fun—my word! if I could only have gone in at him and his best man, a great, slab-sided, six-foot-three fellow, just about as scraggy as he was tallowy, I think I could have spoilt both their figure-heads—one up and the other down.'

'However, there wouldn't have been any sense in charging the whole family, like a knocked-up bullock meeting a picnic party—as I once saw, and didn't he scatter 'em?—so I put on all the side I could, and laid by for a chance.'

'First of all, I shook hands with 'em all round, and came the

warm-hearted fakement. Said "I'd come to say good-bye; they mustn't think I bore any ill-will—just on my way to the north for store cattle, passage taken and all—happened to hear of the wedding to-morrow, and thought I'd look in and wish 'em joy."

"Then, of course, I threw my money about—must have a round of drinks for luck. I never saw a publican yet that could refuse to serve a "shout." Then, of course, *they* must treat me, seeing I was behaving so handsome. Then I must have another round for all hands; and last of all, I gammoned to be a bit "sprung," and must propose the bride's health. So I made 'em fill up. Homminey's little round eyes was beginning to twinkle a bit, and old Walton was getting affectionate, but Carry's mother watched us both like a cat. I said, "I knowed the bride these two years or more, and I proposed her health, and that of the good-hearted, honest, straightforward chap as was going to marry her to-morrow morning." This fetched 'em about a bit. I said, "I'd knowed him a goodish while, and heard tell of him, too, and a better feller couldn't be. After he was married he'd be still better,—a deal better, *that* I could safely go bail for. He couldn't help it, with such a wife. I, therefore, gave the health of Miss Carry Walton and her husband that was to be, to-morrow, and no heel-taps." I never proposed my own health before.

"Well, Homminey, after this, came over and squeezed my hand in his great mutton fist, and looked at me, as if he wasn't quite sure; then he bust out and said I was a real good-natured chap, as didn't bear malice, and I'd always be welcome at Richmond Point.

"Right you are, old corn-cob," says I; "I'll come and see you the very first time you ask me. And now let's have a bit of a dance to finish up with, for my time's short, and I must be off. The steamer leaves at daylight."

"Well, between the grog, and being that glad to get rid of me, that they'd have done anything to see my back, they all agreed to it. There were three or four other girls there; one of 'em, his cousin, was fourteen stone if she was a pound. I gave her a few turns when the music struck up, and then turned to Carry, quite promiskus, directly the tune was altered.

"Oh dear, oh dear, why did you come?" she said in a low tone; "wasn't I miserable enough before?"

"You know the cross-roads?" I says, knocking against the tall chap's partner to drown the words. "There's no time for talking. If you're as true to me as I am to you, will you do as I tell you?"

"You know I will," she said; "what can I do?"

"Can you get out of your bedroom?" I says.

"No. I don't know. Yes—perhaps. I think I can," she said in a strange voice, not a bit like her own.

"Then get away the moment you get to bed—don't stop to

take anything with you, but make straight for the cross-roads. Inside the trees you'll see a buggy with a boy. Stay with him till I come. It will be there till daylight and long afterwards. Will you come, Carry?"

"If I don't come I shall be mad, or locked up, or dead," she said, with such a miserable look on her face that I could hardly help kissing her and comforting her before them all.

Now, the old woman helped us, without wanting to, for she says, "Carry, you're looking like a washed-out print frock; do, for gracious sake, go to bed, and sleep away your headache. She's not been well lately, Mr. Windsor, and she's flustered like at seeing strangers, not but what you've behaved most gentlemanly."

"I'm afraid she's thinkin' about her wedding dress, or her veil, or something," says I. "I wish I could stay, and see how she looks to-morrow, but I can't, and business is business."

Poor Carry was off before this, with just "Good-night all," which made Homminey look rather glum. I ordered another round, saying I must be off; but when it was drunk and paid for, I stayed half an hour before I shook hands, most hearty, and walked out.

The moment I turned the corner of the garden-fence I started off, and ran that mile up to the cross-roads as if all the blacks on Cooper's Creek was after me. Just as I got to the trap I overtook a woman, with a large bundle, labouring along. It never could be—yes *it was*—Carry!

"I first kissed her and then scolded her. "Never a woman born," I said, "that could do without a bundle. Why didn't you leave all that rubbish? ain't you good enough for me as you are?"

"Oh, John," says she, "would you have me come to you in my—in my one frock? Nonsense! every woman must have a little dress."

"Suppose you had been caught?"

"But I'm not caught, except by a bushranger, or some wild character," says she, smiling for the first time. "I'm afraid poor Harry will not enjoy his dinner to-morrow."

"Hang him and his dinner!" said I. "He's all dinner. I've half a mind to go back and murder him now."

But instead of that, we made haste for Appin, after giving the boy a pound. And, to make a long story short, were married there *that day*, for it was past twelve o'clock. And Carry's there with my old mother now, and very proud she is of her.

"I see, John," said Mr. Neuchamp, "that you have carried out one enterprise with your usual success. The other one I want you for, now, is to start at once for Rainbar, and to take delivery of Mildool run and stock, which I bought last week. They agree to muster in six weeks. And you can tell Carry—Mrs. Windsor, I beg her pardon—that she is the overseer's wife

at Mildool. I have decided to give you the management of that run, and I look for wonderful profits from it all this season.'

'And you'll get 'em, sir,' said Mr. Windsor, 'if there's any faith in a fust chop season, and right-down hard work. God Almighty's given us the fust, and if Jake Windsor don't find the second, he wishes his right arm may rot off to the shoulder.'

'I have no doubt that you will do your best, John,' answered Mr. Neuchamp, much gratified by the warm gratitude exhibited by one whose fate at one time lay in his hand; whose after career had done so much to justify his anxiety for the welfare of his fellow-man. 'I have no doubt that Mildool will be the best-managed station on the river—after Rainbar, of course; and that there will be a splendid increase this year,—always providing that no calf bears my brand—and never mistake me on that score—that cannot be honestly provided with a mother of the same ownership.'

Mr. Windsor made a slight gesture of compulsory resignation, as of one who feels himself bound down to superhuman purity; but he said, 'You shall be obeyed in that, sir; and in every other thing you choose to order; though it will come queer to the old hands at Mildool, if all tales are true, to kill their own beef, let alone mothering their calves. But *your word's my law*! And I see now that going straight is the best in the end, whether in big things or little. We'll be off to-morrow, Carry and I, and she can hang it out at Rainbar and have Tot Freeman to talk to—those chaps ain't left yet, I believe—while I'm taking over the cattle at Mildool.'

'That will do very well, John. Meanwhile you can let a contract for a neat six-roomed cottage at Mildool, as there isn't a place there fit for Piambook and his gin to live in. You must consult your wife about the site of it, though, as she will have to live in it and spend many a day by herself there. Don't let her regret the snug parlour and the old orchard at the "Cheshire Cheese," eh, John?'

'Well, it is a great change, now I come to think of it,' said Mr. Windsor, the first expression of distrust coming over his bold features that had been there exhibited since his successful raid upon the lowlanders. 'I daresay she *would* feel struck all of a heap if she was to come upon Mildool old station sudden-like, with the dog-holes of huts, and every tree cut down on the sandhill because the men were too lazy to go out for firewood, or for fear the blacks might sneak on them, and the pile of bones, like a boiling down round the gallows. But, thank God! there's grass now, and there's fat cattle enough in Mildool by this time—for they've never sent away a beast this season, I hear—to build an Exhibition, if it's wanted. Carry's got me, and I've got her, that's the main thing; and I think we shall make shift to jog along. We've got to do it, and no two ways about it. So, good-bye, sir. When shall we see you at Rainbar?'

'I am afraid that business will detain me in Sydney for some weeks longer,' said Mr. Neuchamp thoughtfully, as if mentally calculating the exact day on which he might quit the metropolis. 'But you and Mr. Banks will be able to manage the muster easy enough.'

'Not a bit of bother there need be about it, that I can see, sir. We shall have lots of help; every stockman within a hundred miles will be there. There'll be an awful big mob of strangers; and the Drewarrina poundkeeper hasn't had such a lift for many a day as he'll get. We must square the tails of every beast that's counted, that's one thing, so as not to have 'em played on to us twice over. I think Mr. Banks is down to most moves about cattle work, and what he don't know I can tell him. Good-bye, sir.'

'By the way, John,' said Mr. Neuchamp, 'I shall want you to stay in town this evening, if you can spare so much time away from Carry. I have to see about the draft copy of the sale agreement, which you will take up with you and give to Mr. Banks. Mr. Frankston informs me that these agreements need to be very strictly carried out, and that advantageous purchases *have* been evaded from neglect in doing so. So come out to Morahmee this afternoon, when you can have my final instructions.'

Mr. Neuchamp spent the morning in tolerably close attendance upon lawyers and persons addicted to the drawing up of those paper and parchment promises which, if honour were binding, need never to have troubled penman or engrosser. Nathless, human nature being what it is, and retaining simian tendencies to steal, hide, falsely chatter and closely clutch, the sheepskin may not be safely relinquished. Before Mr. Neuchamp bethought himself of the mid-day solace of lunch he was possessed of a legal document, wherein the exact time granted for mustering and several other leading conditions were set forth with such clearness that evasion or misunderstanding seemed impossible.

A copy of this all-important document was posted to Charley Banks; he brought with him another for the use of Mr. Windsor, who might employ his leisure time on the journey up in learning it by heart, and so render himself able to meet all comers respecting its provisions.

Antonia had expressed a wish to see Jack Windsor, and to send a message to his wife before he left town. For this reason chiefly Ernest had appointed Morahmee as the rendezvous on this particular afternoon. As the shadows lengthened Mr. Neuchamp betook himself in that direction, as indeed he had done daily for weeks past.

It so chanced that, on the evening before, Antonia had received a pink triangular note from Miss Harriet Folleton, who was more or less a friend of hers, to say that she intended to come and lunch with her next day at Morahmee, and would

be there, unless her dear Antonia wrote to say she couldn't have her. There was not any great similitude of taste or disposition between the two girls—one indeed much disapproved of the other. But those who have noted the ways of their *monde* will not decide from this statement that Antonia Frankston and Harriet Folleton did any the less greet one another with kisses and effusion when meeting, or say farewell with lavish use of endearing epithets.

Such being the state of matters, it was by no means surprising that Harriet Folleton, a girl of great beauty and soft, enthralling manner, but of so moderate a development of intellect that she might have been called, if any one had been so rudely uncompromising as to speak the unvarnished truth about so pretty a creature, 'a fool proper,' should arrive in the paternal brougham before mid-day, and therefore share luncheon with her dear Antonia in much innocence and peace.

It would have been even less surprising to any one who had possessed the requisite leisure and opportunity to study that fair girl's ways, that, as the two friends were strolling near the strand, where a giant fig-tree shadowed half the little bay, a boat should pull round the adjoining headland, manned by four man-of-war-looking yachtsmen, with the *White Falcon* on their breasts and hat-ribbons, while from the boat, as she ran up to the jetty, stepped the gracious form of Count von Schätterheims.

'Why, you naughty girl,' said Antonia, instantly divining the ruse, 'I do believe you planned to meet the Count here, and disobey your father. So this coming to see me was all deception! How dare you treat me like this? I have a great mind to tell your father, and never speak to you again.'

'Oh, pray don't, Antonia dearest,' whimpered the softly insincere one, 'I only said I *might* be here this afternoon; and he said he was going off to Batavia, or Russia, or India, or somewhere. And papa was so dreadful, that I thought there was no harm in it. I shall never see him again—oh!' Here the despairingly undecided damsel commenced to weep, and so interfere with the natural charms of her fine and uncommon complexion, that Antonia, inwardly resolving to restrict the acquaintance to conventional limits in future, was constrained to soothe and console her. Meanwhile the Count, who had been engaged in an earnest colloquy with his crew, advanced with his customary gallantry to meet them.

'My boad is on de zshore
And my barg is on de zea ;

is not dat the voord of your boet? I come to make farevell to you, Miss Frankstein; to you, Miss Folledon, to lay at your veet dis hertz—mein hertz—vich is efer for dee so vondly beating.'

'And are you really going to leave us, Count?' asked Antonia,

without any particular interest or otherwise in the noble foreigner, of whom she was becoming wearied and increasingly distrustful. Then happening to look at Harriet Folleton's face, she saw that she was deathly pale, and trembled as if about to fall. The Count, too, though complimentary as usual, seemed annoyed and uneasy at her presence.

The Count, in answer to the question, pointed to his yacht, a beautiful schooner, more fair than honest of aspect and of marvellous sailing powers, which had, perhaps, more than any of his reported possessions, tended to sustain his prestige since his arrival in Sydney.

Antonia's practised eye at once discerned that she was fully equipped for sea. With sails ready to be unfurled at a moment's notice, she could sweep out unchallenged and trackless as the falcon on her ensign, before the freshening south wind which was even now curling the waves with playful but increasing power.

With lightning rapidity she divined the full extent of the girl's imprudence and the Count's villainy. In the same sudden mental effort she resolved, at all hazards, to save her companion from the consequences of her inconceivable folly.

'I did vorm de resolution dat I shall bezeegh you and Miss Folledon to honour me by paying me von last leetle visit on board de *Valgon*, dis afternoon. Mine goot friend Paul, he was goming, but de business—dat pete noir—he brevent him. He ask me to peg Miss Frankstein if she vill, zo also Miss Folledon, vizout her fader, to my so poor-yet-highly-to-be-honoured graft go. Dere is izes, one small collation, a few friend. Surely you will join dem?'

Here the Count beamed the irresistible smile which had through life served him well, and advancing, held out both hands to the young ladies.

'Oh, do let us go!' said the reassured weakling. 'It would be so pleasant. It is such a delightful afternoon. I should like it of all things.'

But Antonia more than ever distrusted the Count, *et dona ferentes*. She disliked his eye, his wily words, the appearance of his swarthy crew, the evidently sea-fitted appearance of the yacht. She felt more than ever convinced that he had matured a deliberate plot to carry off an unsuspecting girl.

Such in truth was the unpardonable sin with which the Herr von Schätterheims had resolved to conclude his Australian career. Unable to meet the many pressing claims upon his finances, the holders of which, he had reason to know, were meditating an advance in line; having failed in the daring speculations in which, by means of humble foreign agents, he had invested the small capital with which he had arrived, and the incredibly large loans which his assurance and reputation for wealth had enabled him to procure,—he had conceived the desperate plan which Antonia's quick intuition had discovered.

He had determined, by force or fraud, to carry off Harriet Folleton, trusting that the irrevocable *coup* once made, time and other considerations would tend to the ultimate wresting of her immense fortune from her father's hands.

Hunted by his creditors and threatened with imprisonment, the Count was now desperate. In such a position he had, more than once during his career, showed no disposition to stick at trifles. His yacht lay within hail—a seabird with her great wings plumed for instant flight, a Norway falcon looking on ocean from a low-placed rocky ridge. His crew of mixed nationality, who had followed him through many a clime, were lawless and devoted. The hour had come when Albert von Schätterheims would stand forth with front unveiled, and show these simple dwellers by the shore of the southern main what manner of man they had dared to drive to bay.

Therefore, when Antonia Frankston stepped forward, and with head erect and flashing eye interposed between the Count and his sacrifice, she confronted a different man from the silky, graceful *serviteur des dames* with whom she had often wished, for some instinctive reason, to quarrel.

‘I cannot go with you now, nor shall Miss Folleton, Count Schätterheims; it would not be right, in my father's absence. Permit us to return to the house.’

‘Beholt me desoladed if Miss Frankstein will not honour my poor boad,’ said the Count, as he barred the progress of the two young ladies on the somewhat narrow green-walled alley which led to the house; ‘but,’ fixing his eye steadily upon Harriet Folleton, ‘I go not forth alone; Miss Harriet Folledon, you bromised me. I haf your vord. You vill come with me now; is it not so, belofet one? Ja! you vill follow de fortunes of Albert von Schätterheims, for efer.’

He strode forward a pace, and seizing the wrist of the frightened girl, spoke rapidly in Spanish, while two of his sailors ran up from the boat, to whom he committed the half-insensible form of the fainting girl.

Antonia Frankston did not faint or swoon. With sudden movement she confronted the Count, with so fierce an air and so unblenching a brow that he involuntarily stepped back a pace, and made as though to protect himself from the onset of a foe.

‘Coward and robber that you are, release her this instant,’ she cried.

The Count smiled sardonically. ‘You will parton me, made-moiselle, if I return you with my complimend for your goot opinion. My engachemends is more pressing, as you gan pelief.’

On the girl's face, as she stood with threatening aspect—a young Bellona—as yet unversed in battles, burned a deeper glow; in her eye flashed a fiercer light as she marked the smile on the calm features of the Count, which, in her heated fancy, seemed the mocking regard of a fiend.

'She shall *not* go!' cried she, springing forward and throwing her arms round the neck of the helpless maid. 'Oh that my father were here—or Ernest—— Robbers, villains, assassins that you are, release her—don't dare to touch *me*!'

But at this moment, at a signal from their chief, the dark-browed, swarthy seamen laid their rude hands upon the sacred form of the deliverer herself, and rapidly hurried both damsels towards the gig. With one wild look to heaven, one frantic gesture of wrath, despair, and abandonment, Antonia Frankston betook herself to one of the best weapons in her sex's armoury, and shrieked till every rock and tree within a mile of Morahmee echoed again.

'*Carambo*!' said one of the men, 'we shall have half Sydney here before we are clear with these shrieking *senoritas*; have you no muffler for her cursed mouth?'

'*Paciencia*, Diego!' said the Count, 'harm her not. A few minutes will suffice—and then——'

But before further infraction of the liberty of the subject could be carried out, Miss Frankston had exhibited for some moments the full force of a very vigorous pair of lungs. The party had nearly reached the little pier, whence so many joyous bands had taken the water, when a man came crashing through the shrubbery, and rushed furiously at Von Schätterheims.

'Stand back, Neuchamp!' shouted the Count, levelling a revolver, 'or you die.'

'Scoundrel and pirate that you are,' said Ernest, facing him with steady eye, 'fire! do your worst. By heaven, I will tear you limb from limb if you do not instantly order your ruffians to desist.'

This rather melodramatic threat was used by Mr. Neuchamp, who was cool enough to take in the precise aspect of the fray at a glance, more with the intention of gaining time than of intimidating five armed men.

He was eminently at a disadvantage as matters stood. He was, so to speak, at the Count's mercy, being at the wrong end of his revolver, and that experienced soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor, or whatever, indeed, in time past might have been his true designation, was far too wary to permit him a chance of closing.

The sailors in whose grasp were Antonia and her guest had drawn their knives, and were prepared for an affray *à l'outrance*. The two seamen in the boat carried sheath knives at least. He could not but admit to himself, grinding his teeth the while, that he had the hazard of beholding his love torn from her home by the rude hands of lawless men, or of dying vainly in her defence.

To this latter alternative, could it but avert her peril, he was willing, nay anxious, to yield himself. But if—if only a short respite could be gained—even now—the issue was uncertain. His resolution was taken.

'Stop your men, Count, while we parley,' he said, 'or by the God above us, you shall shoot me down the next second, and I tear the false heart out of your breast, if you miss. Choose!' And he stepped forward in the face of the levelled weapon.

'You are mat, like every dummer Englander, I pelief,' said the nineteenth-century buccaneer. 'Why should I not kill you for your insults to my honour? But I revrain. I would not meddle with the Fräulein Frankstein—she dell you herself, but she try to rop me of my shpirit-star—my schatz—bromised prite—I presend her to you. I know your sendimend for her. I make you my compliment. Her dempers is angelig.'

Here the Count wreathed his face into such a smile as the companion of Faust may have worn when Marguerite implores the Mater Dolorosa, and spoke rapidly with commanding gesture to his myrmidons, who released their hold upon Miss Frankston. But Antonia still clung with desperate tenacity to the cold hands, the corpse-like form of Harriet Folleton.

'You see she is obstinate—to the death,' said the Count, whose moustache seemed to curl with wrath. 'It is not her affair, or yours; go in beace, gross not my path more furdur.'

'I cannot abandon Miss Folleton, nor will Antonia,' said Mr. Neuchamp, raising his voice so as to drown a peculiar crackling noise in the shrubbery which his ear had caught. 'Do *you* go in peace, Von Schätterheims? Wrong not further the kind hearts that have trusted you; betray not hospitality free and open as ever man received. I will return with both, or not at all.'

'Then die, fool!' hissed the Count, as he raised his weapon and fired full at the head of Ernest Neuchamp, who at the same moment rushed in and closed, while his blood flowed freely from a wound in the forehead, and ensanguined his adversary as they grappled in deadly conflict.

The accuracy of the Count's aim, faultless and unerring in gallery practice, or at the *poupée*, of which he could drill heart, head, or limb, five times out of six, may or may not have been shaken by the sudden apparition of Jack Windsor, or by the portentous yell which that gentleman emitted, worthy of Piambook or Boinmaroo, as he observed the Count in the act of firing at the sacred head of his benefactor.

Too late to interpose with effect as he stood on a block of sandstone overlooking the scene of conflict, he raised his voice in one of the half-Indian cries with which the horsemen of the Central Desert are wont to intimidate the unwilling herd at the stockyard gates. The sailors started and gazed with astonishment as Mr. Windsor sprang recklessly from his elevated post, and cleared the rough declivity with a succession of bounds, emulating, not unworthily, the hard-pressed 'flyer' of his country's forests when the grim gazehounds are close on haunch and flank.

Straight as a line for the men that held the captive maids went the henchman, and as they hurriedly released their prey and stood on guard, Mr. Neuchamp could have offered a votary's prayer to the patron saint of old England's weaponless gladiators, as he marked the unarmed Anglo-Saxon's rapid unswerving onset.

Though there, the western mountaineer
Rushed with bare bosom on the spear,
And flung the feeble targe aside,
And with both hands the broadsword plied.

Mr. Windsor so far resembled Donald at Flodden Field, that he trusted chiefly to natural strength and courage. But none the less did he display an amount of coolness and cunning of fence characteristically Australian.

Charging the nearest Frenchman, as he took him to be, and indeed in all future relation so described him, with the velocity of a mallee three-year-old, he feinted with his right hand at the forehead of his foe, and as the Mexican-Spaniard, for such he was, raised his arm for a deadly stab, he suddenly gripped his wrist, catching him full in the face with the 'terrible left,' and stretched him senseless and bleeding at his feet. Snatching up the knife, he had but time to parry a stroke which shrewdly scored his right arm, when his other antagonist was upon him. Both men glared at one another with uplifted knives—for a moment; in the next Mr. Windsor swept his antagonist's outstretched foot from under him with a Cornish wrestler's trick—a lift—a dull thud, and he lay on his back, with Jack's knee on his chest and the dangerous knife in the bushman's belt.

In the meanwhile Miss Frankston, perceiving that the men who had charge of the boat showed no disposition to quit their station, half dragged, half raised Miss Folleton along the path to the verandah steps, halting just within sight of the combatants.

'Now, do you prefer being dragged up to the house, Von Schätterheims?—by Jove! I shoot you where you stand if you resist,' inquired Ernest of that nobleman, whom he had mastered after a severe struggle, and whose revolver he now pointed at those classical features, 'or will you depart in God's name, and rid us of your presence for ever?'

'It is Fade,' said the Count gloomily. 'He is too strong. My shtar is under an efil influence. I will quid dese accurset lants. Let your man—teufel dat he is with his boxanglais—release my grew, and I go; but stay—I am guildy by your laws; why should you release me?'

'You deserve death for your outrage,' replied Ernest sternly. 'You could hardly escape lifelong imprisonment. But I would not willingly see the man, at whose board I have sat, in the felon's cell. Go, and repent. Also—and this is my chief reason

—I would willingly evade the *esclandre* which your public trial for this day's proceedings would cause.'

'Ha! not the deet. But the fama—what you call "scandal,"' said the Count wonderingly. 'But you English, you are as efer, a strange—a so wunderlich beoples. Still, I go. It is all that is left to Albert von Schätterheims in this hemis-vahr—to steal away, like the hund, beaden, disgraced, dishonoured. Fahrwohl. Dell to the Fräulein my regret, my despair, my shames. Under another schtar Albert von Schätterheims mighd haf geliebt und gelebt—but all dings is now ofer.'

Ernest stepped back and motioned him to arise, still keeping guard. The Count called aloud to his men, one of whom still lay beneath Mr. Windsor's thrall, and the other sitting up, all blood-stained, swayed backward and forward, as only half recovered from a swoon.

'Let your men go, John,' said Mr. Neuchamp. 'The treaty of Morahmee is arranged between the high contracting powers. They will not renew the war,' he continued, as the Count and Jack's last antagonist between them raised the fainting man and led him down to the gig, which in the briefest period was seen heading for the yacht as fast as oars could drive her.

'My word, sir,' said Mr. Windsor, 'it looked very crooked when I come on the ground. I saw that frog-eating mounseer potting you with his squirt like a treed 'possum—both the young ladies, too, being run off to sea with, clean and clear against their wills. I don't hold with that sea business at all—it's dangerous—let alone with a boss like the Count, who's wanted in his own country, like as not. However, we euchred 'em this time, whoever plays next game.'

'You behaved like a trump, Jack. You were my genuine "right bower,"' said Mr. Neuchamp with unwonted humour and heartiness. 'Without you we should never have won the odd trick. I knew that you were just behind me at Woolloomooloo; but I was terribly afraid that you could not be up in time.'

'If one John Windsor's anyways handy when you're in trouble, sir, you'll mostly find him there or thereabouts, as long as he's alive, that is. I can't say afterwards. What do you think, sir, about what comes after all this rough-and-tumble that we coves call life?' demanded Jack with sudden interest.

'I don't think too much about it, which is perhaps the best wisdom. But of this we may be sure, John, that no man will fare worse in the other world for doing his duty as a man and a Christian in this.'

When the house was reached, it appeared that Miss Folleton had been handed over to the good offices of her friend's maid, and was recovering her nervous system in the seclusion of a guest-chamber. Antonia, having smoothed her hair, and re-

arranged herself generally, awaited the victor in the verandah. She stood gazing seawards with a haughty air of defiance, which still savoured of the fray. The light of battle had not faded from her eye; a bright flush embellished with rare and wondrous beauty the untinted marble of her delicate features.

As she stood, unconsciously statuesque, and gazed half unheeding in her rapt regard of the flying bark, the long-loved, fast-thronging, magical glories of the evening ocean-pageant,

. . . the day was dying :
Sudden the sun shone forth ; its beams were lying
Like boiling gold on ocean, strange to see ;
And on the shattered vapours, which defying
The power of light in vain, tossed restlessly
In the red heaven like wrecks in a tempestuous sea.

‘It is you,’ she said, suddenly turning towards Ernest with a look of praise and gratitude almost childlike in its absence of reserve. ‘How can I, how will my father, ever thank you for this day’s deeds? I had given up all for lost; that is, as far as that foolish Harriet was concerned. They should have torn me limb from limb before they should have placed us in their boat. Then I determined to fight for Harriet, to—yes! I believe that is the word, for I really felt the real fighting spirit all over—it is not such a very unpleasant sensation as one would think. I was quite *exaltée*, and if I had had a revolver, I think the Count would have paid forfeit with his life, whatever might have come after. Papa would kill him now if they met.’

‘Is there no fear of such a meeting?’

‘None, thank Heaven!’ said Antonia, ‘though he deserves the worst in the shape of punishment. Sydney has seen the last of him. Look!’ she cried, as every sail on the long, low, beautiful schooner filled as if by magic, and the graceful craft, leaning to the full force of the strong south wind, swept forth towards the sea-way.

‘He is safe from pursuit,’ she continued, ‘even if tidings could have been sent at the instant. With this breeze behind him, there is nothing in Sydney which would not be hull down behind the *White Falcon* before day broke. Of course he will steer for one of the northern ports, or else for the Islands. They must have had every sail tied with spun-yarn, so as to be ready to unfurl at a moment’s notice. To you alone, and to that brave Jack Windsor, it is due that we are not miserable captives in yonder flying bark. I shudder to think of it.’

‘I should have done little without John,’ said Mr. Neuchamp. ‘He came up like Blücher at Waterloo, and I was as impatiently awaiting his arrival as the Duke. Here—receive Miss Frankston’s thanks, John; then, with her permission, you can go and ask the butler for some beer. I daresay you feel equal to it.’

'You have behaved this day, John Windsor, like a brave man and a true Australian,' said Antonia, giving her hand to Jack, which he shook carefully and with much caution, relinquishing the dainty palm with evident relief. 'My father will know how to thank the rescuer of his daughter; and she will remember you as a gallant fellow and a friend in need all the days of her life.'

'Thank you, miss,' said Mr. Windsor, with a respectful yet puzzled air. 'I've had many a worse shindy than this in my time, and got no thanks either—t'other way on, 'n deed. But of course I couldn't help rolling in, seeing the master double-banked, and you young ladies being made to join a water-party against your wills. Don't you have no more truck with them boats, miss; they're too uncertain altogether. Nothing like dry land to my taste; even if the season's bad, there's a something to hang on by. My respects, miss, and I'll try that beer; my throat's like a bark chimney with the soot afire.'

'And now I must order you, Mr. Neuchamp, to betake yourself to your room. Look in the glass and see if your complexion hasn't suffered. Was it the Count's blood which flowed, or did you scratch your face with the prickly pear hedge? Let me look! Merciful heaven!' exclaimed the girl, with a half scream, as she narrowly scanned her deliverer's face; 'why, there is the deep trace of a bullet on your temple. How providential that it was the least bit wide—a slight turn of your head—a shade nearer the temple, and you would have been lying there dead—dead! How awful to think of!'

Here she covered her face with her hands. Tears trickled through the slender palms as her overwrought feelings found relief in a sudden burst of weeping.

Mr. Neuchamp's attempts at consolation would appear not to have been wholly ineffectual, if one may judge from the concluding sentences of rather a long-whispered conversation, all carried on prior to the lavation of his gory countenance.

'I always thought,' said Antonia, smiling through her tears, with as much satirical emphasis as could coexist with so sudden an access of happiness, 'that you wanted some one to take care of you in Australia. I fear I have been led into undertaking a very serious responsibility.'

'May it not be the other way?' very naturally inquired Ernest. 'If I had not been, as Jack would say, "there or thereabouts," to-day, some one might have been a pirate's bride, after all. Miss Folleton, of course, had prior claims, but——'

'But—please to go and render yourself presentable, this instant. We shall have such an amount of talking to do before we can put poor dear old pappy in possession of all the news. Good gracious, how can we ever tell him? How furious he will be!'

'Will he?' inquired Ernest, with affected apprehension; 'perhaps we had better defer our——'

'I don't mean *that*—and you know it, sir; but, unless you wish to be taken for a pirate yourself, or an escaped I-don't-know-what, you will do as I tell you.'

So Ernest was fain to do as he was bid, commencing, unconsciously indeed, that period of servitude to which every son of Adam, all unheeding, is pledged, who rivets on himself the floweret-wreathed adamantine fetters of matrimony. He sought Mr. Frankston's extremely comfortable dressing-room, at the behest of his beloved *châtelaine*; and very glad he was to find himself there.

His sense of relief and general congratulation was, however, slightly alloyed by the thought of the stupendous amount of explanation and narrative due to Paul Frankston, when this now fast-approaching hour of dinner should arrive.

'I would it were bedtime, and all well,' groaned he, in old Falstaff's words, as he addressed himself to the rather serious duties of the toilette.

Mr. Frankston arrived from town but a few minutes before the dinner-hour, and, like a wise man, made at once for his room.

'Only just time to dress, darling,' said he to his daughter. 'Got such a budget of news; met Croker just as I was coming out, tell Ernest. No end of news—quite unparalleled. You will be surprised, and so will he.'

'And so will you,' thought Mr. Neuchamp, who just came into the hall in time to hear the concluding sentence. But he darkly bided his time.

As the dinner bell rang forth issued Mr. Frankston, radiant with snowy waistcoat and renovated *personnel*, having the air at once of a man in good hope and expectation of dinner, also conscious of the possession of news which, however sensationally disastrous, does not prejudicially affect himself.

'Now then,' he said, the soup having been disposed of, and the mildly stimulating Amontillado imbibed, 'what do you think has become of our friend—or, rather, your friend, Antonia, for you never would let me abuse him—the Count von Schätterheims?'

'What indeed?' replied Antonia, looking at her plate.

'Well, he has bolted, levanted, cleared out, on board his famous yacht, the *White Falcon*, for some northern port—Batavia, the Islands, New Guinea—no one knows.'

'How about money matters?' inquired Ernest.

'Well, you both take it coolly, I must say,' said Paul, hurt at the small effect of his great piece of ordnance. 'As to money, all Sydney, in the legitimate credit way, is left lamenting. He had been operating very largely of late, and his losses and defalcations are immense. Yorick and Co.'s bill for wines and liqueurs is something awful.'

'Alas, poor Yorick!' said Ernest, with so pathetic an emphasis that Antonia could not help laughing.

'You two seem very facetious to-night,' quoth Paul with dignity. 'It is no laughing matter, I can tell you. But you won't laugh at *this*, I fancy. Croker told me that it was everywhere believed that he had persuaded that unhappy, infatuated girl Harriet Folleton to accompany him in his flight.'

Mr. Frankston uttered these last words with a deep solemnity, imparted to his voice by the heartfelt pity which, at any time, he could have felt for the victim in such a case.

His daughter and Ernest were sufficiently ill-bred to laugh.

'Hang me if I understand this!' he commenced, in tones of righteous indignation; and then, softening, 'Why, Antonia, dearest, surely you must pity——'

'Papa, she is upstairs and in bed at this very moment, so she can't have run away with the Count. There must be a mistake somewhere.'

'So there must, so there must,' said Paul, instantly mollified, and addressing himself to his dinner. 'I'm a hot-tempered old idiot, I know. But there's no mistake about the Count's debts, or the Count's flight. He was sighted by No. 4 pilot cutter that brought in the English liner, the *Cumberland*, this evening, steering nor'-nor'-east, and before such a breeze as will see him clear of anything from this port before daylight.'

'He has gone, safe enough,' said Ernest; 'indeed, we watched him go through the Heads from the verandah—a most fortunate migration, in my opinion. He has conferred an immense benefit upon the country by leaving it, which I trust he will confirm by never returning.'

'Then you saw him go from here?' inquired Mr. Frankston. 'Was he close enough for you to see him?'

'Well,' admitted Ernest, 'he certainly *was* close enough to see, and, indeed, to feel; but it's rather a long story, and if you are going to smoke this evening, we can have it all out on the verandah.'

'I think I must go and see how my visitor is getting on,' said Antonia; 'and as I feel tired, I will make my farewell for the evening.'

Was there in the outwardly formal handshaking a sudden instinctive pressure? Was there in the hasty glance a lighting up of hitherto lambent fires in the clear depths of Antonia's deep-hued eyes—an added, half-remorseful, half-clinging tenderness in the never-omitted caress which marked her evening parting with her father? If so, that father was all unconscious, and the outward tokens were so faint as to have been invisible to all but one deeply interested, near-sighted observer.

'I am much relieved to find that poor girl Harriet Folleton has not been carried off after all by that scoundrel, who has taken us all in so splendidly,' growled Paul. 'Of course, now the mischief is done, all kinds of reports are going about the city as to his real character. People say he was a valet, or a

courier ; others, a supercargo, who ran away with that pretty boat he brought here. He certainly had a very good notion of handling a yacht.'

'Let me tell you, then, that it is chiefly owing to your daughter's courage and unselfish determination to save her friend at all hazards, that Harriet Folleton is not now a captive in yonder yacht, hopelessly lost and disgraced,' announced Mr. Neuchamp, commencing his broadside.

'Why, you don't tell me that the scoundrel came *here* and attempted any violence?' said the old man, rising excitedly and performing the regulation quarterdeck walk up and down the verandah, while he dashed his ignited cigar excitedly out over the lawn. 'If I knew—if I had known this day that he dared to set his foot upon these grounds with a lawless purpose towards any guest of Antonia's, I'd have followed him to the Line and hanged him at his own yardarm.'

As the old man uttered these very decided sentiments, somewhat at variance with the Navigation Act and international usage, his brow darkened, his eye gleamed with pitiless light, and his arm was raised with a gesture which indicated familiarity with the cutlass and the boarding-pike.

'You must not excite yourself,' said Ernest, laying his hand kindly on the old man's arm. 'Remember, first of all, that the offender is beyond pursuit ; that he was baulked in his evil purpose, and that he suffered ignominious defeat, chiefly through the timely help of Jack Windsor, who assisted me to rout the attacking force.'

'Good God !' exclaimed the old man. 'Attack—defeat ; what has happened ? and I sat gossiping at the club, while you were defending my home and my honour !'

'Could I do less ? However, you had better hear the whole story straight out. No harm has been done, and the enemy was routed with loss.'

The story was told. Full justice was done to Antonia's heroism. Jack Windsor's prowess received its meed of praise. His own fortunate overthrow of the Count by good luck, and a little more practice in wrestling than continental usages render familiar, was slightly alluded to. Finally, he explained his reasons for assisting the escape of Von Schätterheims, and thereby confining the scandal of his attempted abduction to the narrow limit of the actual participants in the affray.

Mr. Frankston walked the deck of a long-departed imaginary vessel so long without speaking that Ernest feared some rending typhoon of wrath after the enforced calm. But the event justified his best surmises. Placing his hand upon his guest's arm, Paul said, in a voice vibrating with emotion—

'I see in you, Ernest Neuchamp, a man who this day has saved my honour and my life—hers, to whom this poor remnant of existence is but as this worthless weed.' (Here he cast from him the half-consumed cigar.) 'From this day forth you are

my son—take everything that I can give. Paul Frankston holds nothing back from the man who has done what you have done this day. I am but your steward—your manager, my dear boy, henceforward.’

‘There is *one* of your possessions—the most precious, the most priceless among them,’ answered Ernest, holding up his head with a do-or-die sort of air, ‘and that one I now ask of you. We are past phrases with each other. But you will understand that I at least do not undervalue the worth of Antonia Frankston’s heart, of your daughter’s hand!’

Mr. Frankston once more paced the long-faded deck and communed with the broad and heaving deep. Then he turned. His eyes, from which the strange fire had faded wholly out, had a softened, perhaps somewhat clouded light.

‘Ernest Neuchamp,’ he said, ‘if this day has witnessed, perhaps, the most bitter insult, the deepest humiliation to which Paul Frankston has ever been subjected, it has also witnessed his greatest joy. Take her—with her old father’s blessing. You have, what he considers, earth’s greatest treasure; and it is no flattery, but honest liking, when he swears that you are worthy of her. As far as human look-out can see over life’s course, Paul Frankston’s troubles and anxieties are over. Now I can take my cigar again.’

More than one cigar was needed to allay the old man’s overstrained nervous system. Long they sat and talked, and saw the moon rise higher in the star-gemmed sky, casting a broader silver flame across the tremulous illumined deep; while between Ernest Neuchamp and the old man again stood a shadowy, diaphanous, divinely-moulded form, turning into an elysian aroma the scent of Paul’s cigars, and echoing the secret gladness of each thought, which in that hour of supernal loveliness and unutterable joy flowed from the bared heart of Ernest Neuchamp.

On the next morning Aurora in person must have attended to the proper arrangement of the dawn, the breakfast hour, and other small matters which, apparently trivial, tend unquestionably to that due equilibrium of the nervous system, without which comfort is impossible and exhilaration hopeless.

Thus, Miss Folleton, having slept well, appeared renovated and just becomingly repentant. Antonia was severely happy, Mr. Neuchamp calmly superior to fate, and Mr. Frankston so hilarious that his daughter had to interpose more than once.

That ambrosial repast concluded, Antonia departed for town in the carriage, and straightway delivered up Miss Folleton to her rejoicing relatives, who had suffered anxiety in her absence. Hers was an impressionable, shallow nature, recovering easily from moral risks and disasters—even from physical ills. Her appetite reasserted itself; her love of life’s frivolities, temporarily obscured, brightened afresh; and long

before the legend of the debts, the daring, the disappearance of the Count von Schätterheims had been supplanted by newer scandal, her cheek had recovered its wonted bloom, her step its lightness in the dance, and her mien its touchingly dependent grace.

In due time she had her reward ; for she captured, after a short but brilliant campaign, consisting of an oratorio, a lawn party, and three dances, an immensely opulent northern squatter. She looks fair and pure as the blue sky above her, as she rolls by, dressed *à merveille*, in the best-appointed carriage in Sydney. But for happiness—who shall say ?

In the meanwhile unlimited pleasure-seeking and universal admiration supply a reasonable substitute.

CHAPTER XXX

MR. NEUCHAMP, having now occasional leisure to reflect, discovered that he was provided with an extensive and valuable property which he *had* partly come to Australia to seek, and with an affianced bride, whom he had not at all included among his probable possessions. As for the great project of Colonial Reform, which had stood out grandly dominating the landscape in the future of his dreams, with the solitary exception of the conversion of Jack Windsor, he could not aver that he had accomplished anything.

His co-operative community had notably failed in practice ; but for the aid and counsel of Mr. Levison, it might have overthrown his own fortune, without particularly benefiting the individuals of this society.

Whenever he had acted upon his own discretion, and in furtherance of advanced views, he had been conspicuously wrong. Where he had followed the ideas of others, or been forced into them by circumstances, he had been invariably right. Where he had been generous, he had been deceived ; where he had been cautious, he had found himself extravagant in loss ; where he had been rash, riches had rolled in upon him with flowing tide. His most elaborate estimates of character had been ludicrously erroneous. His advice had been inapplicable, his theories unsound. Practice—mostly blindfold—had alone given him a glimmering knowledge of the relatively component parts of this most contradictory, unintelligible antipodean world.

Mr. Neuchamp, having reached the very visible landmark of an engagement in his pilgrimage of love, was much minded to press for an immediate union, believing, now that the rain had come, there existed no rational impediments in the way of this last supreme success. Well-informed persons will know that no such outrage upon *les convenances* could for a moment be tolerated. Baffled but not despondent, he returned to the charge with such determination that the event was fixed to take place in about two months, as being the earliest hour anything so dreadful could be thought of.

So much being gained, Ernest became speedily aware that being at all hours and seasons subject to the raids of milliners' attendants and others was a state of existence out of harmony with a poet's soul. Thus, after divers unsatisfactory and interrupted interviews with Antonia, he took his passage by the mail, and heroically started for Rainbar.

This brilliant combination of business with necessity would, he thought, serve to while away the weary hours between the scorned present and the beautiful future. Rainbar and Mildool had to be visited at some time or other. Although the luxurious life of the metropolis had gained upon him, Ernest Neuchamp always arose, Antæus-like, fresh to the call of duty.

When he quitted the railway terminus and entered the mail coach which was to convey him to his destination, the full magnitude of the mighty change of season burst upon him. During his stay in Sydney the short, bright southern spring-time had been born and was ripening into summer, with what effect upon plant life it was now a marvel of marvels to see.

Mr. Neuchamp's novitiate had been served during the latter years of a 'dry cycle.' He had seen fair growth of pasture towards Christmas time, but of the amazing crop of grass and herbage uncared for, wasted, or burned, in what Mr. Windsor called 'an out-and-out wet season,' he had no previous experience.

From the moment that the coach cleared the forest parks which skirted the plains, Ernest found himself embarked upon a 'measureless prairie,' where the tall green grass waved far as eye could see in the summer breeze. A millennium of peace and plenty had apparently arrived for all manner of graminivorous creatures. How different was the aspect of these 'happy hunting grounds,' velvet-green of hue, flower-bespangled, brook-traversed, with the forgotten sound of falling waters ever and anon breaking on the ear, with hum of bee and carol blithe of bird, as the sleek-coated, high-conditioned coach horses rattled the light drag merrily over the long, long road! What a wondrous transformation! Would Augusta, *la belle cousine*, have believed that all this glorious natural beauty had been born, grown, and developed 'since the rain came'?

When at length the journey was over, and the proprietor of Rainbar and Mildool was deposited, with his portmanteau, at the garden gate of the former station, Mr. Neuchamp was constrained to confess that he hardly knew his own place. There had been much growth and greenery when he left with the fat cattle; but the riotous extravagance of nature in that direction could not have been credited by him without actual eye-witness.

Around the buildings, the garden fence, the stockyard, the cowshed, was a growth of giant herbage, composed of wild oats, wild barley, marsh-mallows, clover, and fodder plants unnamed, that almost smothered these humble buildings and enclosures.

A few milch cows fed lazily, looking as if they had been employed in testing the comparative merits of oilcake and Thorley's cattle-food, for an agricultural experiment. The river flats below the house were knee-deep in clover and meadow grasses, causing Mr. Neuchamp to wonder whether or no it would be worth while to go in for a mowing-machine and a few horse-rakes, for the easy conversion of a fraction of it into a few hundred tons of meadow hay, to be stored against the next 'dry year.' The mixed grasses, as he had tested in a small way, made excellent hay. But how far off looked such a calamity! Thus, ever with 'youth at the prow and pleasure at the helm,' do we lightly measure the future, recking neither of stormy sky nor of the ravening deep.

After Mr. Neuchamp had sufficiently admired the grassy wilderness, thoughts arose respecting dinner, and also a feeling of wonder where everybody was. The station appeared to be minding itself. The cook was absent, though recent indications of his presence were visible in the kitchen. Charley Banks was away and Jack Windsor, probably at Mildool; also Piambook, whose open countenance and dazzling teeth would have been better than nothing. Where was Mrs. Windsor, *née* Walton? He had rather looked forward to having a talk with her under new conditions of life. She could not be at Mildool, as there was no shelter for a decent woman there. What in the name of wonder had become of them all? There were no Indians in this country, or he might have turned his thoughts in the direction of Blackfeet or Comanches, the 'wolf Apaché and the cannibal Navajo.' Not even a Mormon settlement handy enough to organise a 'mountain-meadows massacre'! He never thought Rainbar so lonely before. He went into the cottage, and in a leisurely way unpacked his portmanteau in the snug bedroom which he had so long inhabited—where he had so often, before the rain came, lain down in sorrow and arisen in despair. What a tiny wooden box it seemed! Yet he had thought it comfortable, even luxurious. Like those of many other distinguished travellers and heroes long absent from the scene of early conflict or youthful habitation, the eyes of Mr. Neuchamp had altered their focus.

After three months' familiarity with the lodging of clubs and villas, the neat but necessarily contracted apartments of his bush cottage appeared like cupboards, or even akin to a watch-box which he had once dwelt in at Garrandilla.

However, he knew by former experience that a week or two of station life would restore his vision, his appetite, and his contentment with the district. Further than that he did not go. At the present price of cattle, it was not likely that he would need ever again to spend as many months consecutively at Rainbar as he had devoted to that desirable but isolated abode before the 'drought broke up.'

Having had ample time for comparison and appropriate

reflections, he was at length set free from the apprehension that he was the sole inhabitant of Rainbar by the appearance of old Johnny, the cook, who expressed great delight and satisfaction at seeing him, and, explaining his absence by the statement that he had taken a walk of five miles down the river in order to buy a bag of potatoes from a dray loaded with those rare esculents, proceeded to place him in possession of facts.

‘Every one about the place was away mustering at Mildool,’ he said, ‘including Mr. Banks, both the blackfellows, Jack Windsor, and even Mrs. Windsor, who, finding that there was an unoccupied hut formerly belonging to a dairyman at Mildool, had joined the mustering party. He (Johnny) hadn’t had a soul to talk to for three weeks since the muster began, and was as miserable as a bandicoot.’

The old man bustled about, laid the cloth neatly, and cooked and served an inviting meal, which Ernest, after the reckless preparations supplied to coach passengers, really enjoyed. It was far into the night when the sound of horses’ hoofs was heard, and Mr. Banks, carrying his saddle and bridle, which he placed upon the verandah, let go his courser to graze at ease, entered the spare bedroom, undressed, and was in bed and asleep all in the space of about two minutes and a half, as it seemed to Mr. Neuchamp, from the first sound of his arrival. He did not care to make himself known to the wearied youngster, and reserved that sensation, very wisely, as might be many other pieces of news and matters of business, until morning light.

With the new day arising, the active youth was much astonished, and even more gratified, to find his employer again under the same roof. At the daylight breakfast of the bush—*de rigueur* when unusual work of any kind is going forward—he favoured Ernest with a full recital of all the exciting news.

‘Everything was well as could possibly be. All the cattle at Rainbar were fat as pigs; all the “circle dot” cattle, all Freemans’ lot, which had really turned out a famous bargain. A dealer from Ballarat had been up a week since, and to him he had sold the whole of the Freeman horses at fifteen pounds a head, cash, young and old. He didn’t think, when old Cottonbush put the brand on them, that they’d ever see a ten-pound note for the whole boiling. He had the dealer’s cheque—a good one too, or he wouldn’t have taken it—for twelve hundred and fifteen pounds! There were just eighty-one head.

‘As for the back country, it looked lovely. Grass and water everywhere. The Back Lake was full; the river was bank high, and if there was a flood—a regular big one—he wouldn’t say but what the water might flow into the canal after all and fill the Outer Lake. By the way, there were some back blocks for sale at the back of Rainbar and Mildool, and if he had his way they should be bought, as it would give them the command of all the back country as far as Barra Creek, and keep

other people from coming in by and by, and perhaps giving trouble ; nothing like securing all your back country while it is cheap.

'With regard to Mildool it was the best bargain he, Charley Banks, had ever seen. All unbranded stock were to be given in, and there would be calves and yearlings enough to brand to pay two years' wages to every man employed on both runs. They had pretty well got through the count ; there would be a two or three hundred head over the muster number, which would be no harm, and it was only ordinary store price for half fat cattle broken in to the run. As to fat stock, you might go on to any camp and cut out with your eyes shut ; you couldn't go wrong ; they were all fat together, young and old. Mooney, the dealer, stayed a night last week, and said he would give seven pounds all round for a thousand head, half cows, to be taken in three months. He thought it was a fair offer. It saved all the bother of sending men on the roads, and when you let the mob out of your yard you get your cheque, or draft, as the case might be. He was always for selling on the run, as long as the buyers were known men.'

'How was Mrs. Windsor ?'

'Oh, she was a brick—a regular trump—something like a woman ! When she found Jack would only come back from Mildool once a week, she inquired whether there was any sort of a hut that could hold a small family at Mildool ; was told there was the old dairymen's hut at Green Bend, about a mile from the station. So she said she would rather live in a packing-case than be separated from her husband ; and as Mildool was to be their home, they might as well go there at once. The end of it was that she made Jack take her traps over, and she has got the old place so neat and comfortable that any one might live there, small as it is, and enjoy life. She was a downright sensible woman, as well as a deuced good-looking one, and she would make Jack a rich man before he died.'

'Was there anything else to tell ?'

'Well, not much. He was going to let Jack have Boinmaroo at Mildool, and keep Piambook here ; when they mustered at either place they could join forces. Oh ! the Freemans. Well, they had all gone a month back. Joe and Bill had gone to take up more land in the Albury district. Wish them joy wherever they go. We're quit of them, that's one comfort. Abraham Freeman and his lot cleared out for his old place at Bowning. They'll do well there in a quiet way. Poor Tottie was sorry to leave Rainbar, and cried like fun. Had to comfort her a bit when the old woman wasn't looking. It's a beastly nuisance having other people's stock on your run, and other people's boys galloping about all over the country, whether you like it or not. Was deuced glad to see their teams yoked and their furniture on, I can tell you. Suppose you'd like to ride over to Mildool, now you are here ?'

Mr. Neuchamp thought he might as well, although fully satisfied that the muster would have been satisfactorily completed without him. So the two men rode over that day and had a look at the humours of a delivery muster.

There was, as usual, great skirmishing about the ownership of calves temporarily separated from their maternal parents, one stockman averring that he remembered every spot on a certain calf's hide since its early infancy, others corroborating his assertion, that it 'belonged to,' or was the progeny of, his old black 'triangle-bar' cow; Mr. Windsor, as counsel for the Crown, declaring, on the other hand, that no calf should leave the Mildool run unless provided with a manifest mother, then and there substantiating her claim to maternity by such personal attentions or privileges as could not be fabricated or misunderstood. To him the adverse stockman would remark that, if he was going to talk like that, he might stick to every blessed clear-skin on the river. Mr. Windsor retorting that he doesn't say for that, but if people think they can collar calves for the asking, they've come to the wrong shop when they ride to Mildool muster. And so on, and so on.

Nathless, in course of time all things are arranged, in some shape, with or without a proportionate allowance of growling, as the men say. It being apparent that Mr. Windsor, now full-fledged overseer of Mildool, knows a thing or two, and will stand up stoutly for his master's rights, fewer encroachments are, let us suppose, attempted.

The cattle are counted and finally gathered, and are discovered to exceed, by three hundred odd, the station number. The former manager feels complimented that he has been able to muster beyond his books. The purchaser is satisfied, as the additional cattle are merely charged to him at store cattle price, and, being 'to the manor born' will swiftly 'grow into money.' The strange stockmen depart, carrying with them a large mixed drove of strayed cattle. The ex-overseer pays his men and then leaves for down the country, there to wait on the agents, and receive his *congé* or further employment, as the case may be. Charley Banks and the black boys, Jack Windsor, and Mr. Neuchamp are left in undisputed possession of the new kingdom.

With such a season, with such prices ruling, the management is the merest routine work,—a few hundred calves to brand, arrangements to make for an early muster to show the herd to the great cattle-dealer, who wants to buy a thousand head fat, to be taken away in three months, and paid for by his acceptance at that date. Mr. Mooney happens to come before Ernest leaves for Sydney, and the negotiation being successful, the new proprietor of Mildool sets out for the metropolis with a negotiable bill in his pocket for seven thousand pounds—more than a third of the purchase-money of the run.

While Mr. Neuchamp was possessing his soul in tranquillity

at Rainbar, he was surprised at receiving a letter from his erstwhile Turonia comrade, Mr. Bright. That cheerful financier wrote as follows :

TURONIA, 10th December 18—.

MY DEAR NEUCHAMP—I hear you are to be married to the nicest girl in Sydney. I thought it only reasonable, considering our two or three larks here, to offer my congratulations ; and, by the bye, talking of things happening, that fellow Greffham, whom you remember my helping to arrest, was hanged last Wednesday at Medhurst.

The evidence, joined to his paying away the numbered notes, known to be in the escort parcel, was awfully strong against him. He made no confession, and was as cool and unconcerned to the very last, as you and I ever saw him at the billiard-table. What a wonderful uphill game he could play ! It is just possible he might have got off ; but Merlin fished up additional evidence which fixed him, in the eyes of the jury, I think—the groom at the inn, who swore he saw a small parcel covered with a gray rug on his saddle, as he returned from the direction of Running Creek, which he had not when he passed up. You ought to have seen him and Merlin look at each other when Merlin asked the Crown prosecutor to have Carl Anderson called. It was a ‘duel with eyes.’ But, even without that, I don’t see how he could have accounted for the notes.

I happened to be in Medhurst the day he was to be turned off. I received a message that he wanted to see me, so I went to the gaol. I knew the sheriff well. They showed me into his cell at once.

When I got in, Greffham nearly had finished dressing, and had only to put on his frock coat to be better turned out, if possible, than he was for the lawn party Branksome gave when the Governor came up. He happened to be cleaning his teeth—you remember how white and even they were—as I came through the door.

‘Sit down, old man,’ he said, just as usual, shying his tooth-brush into the corner of the cell. ‘I daresay they’ll do ; and I suppose I shan’t want *that* any more. What should you say ? ’Pon my soul, there isn’t a chair to offer you ; devilish close about furniture, aren’t they now ? But it’s very kind of you, Bright, to come and see a fellow, when he’s—well—peculiarly situated, eh ?’

Here he laughed quite naturally, I give you my word—not forced at all. He certainly *was* the coolest hand I ever saw ; and he died as he lived.

‘What I wanted to see you for, Bright, was this’—here his voice shook and he *did* appear to show a little feeling—‘you’ll take these two letters for me, like a good fellow ; one I want you to send to — after I am gone ; the other you can open *then*. Make what use you like of the contents. I shan’t care then ; say nothing *now* to gratify curiosity. As to what I may have done, or not done, I hold myself the best judge of my reasons. You know what my life has been. Open and straightforward, if somewhat reckless. My cards have always been on the table. I have risked all that man holds dear on a throw before. This time I have lost. I pay the stakes ; there is no more to be said. Lionel Greffham is not the man to say “I repent.” He is what he is, and will die as he has lived. My time on earth has not been spun out much, but, measured by enjoyment, with a front seat mostly at life’s opera, it adds up fairly. Give me a Havannah from your case. You will see me

pretty "fit" for the stage when they ring in the leading performer. By the way, I told them to give you my revolver; and while I think of it, just remember this, if you want to make *very close shooting* at any time, only put in three parts of the powder in the cartridge.'

I really believe these were his last words, except to the — hangman.

He finished his cigar, and lounged up to the gallows, where he died in the face of a tremendous crowd, calmly and scornfully, just as he was accustomed to bear himself to them in life. Jack Ketch was a new hand, and nervous. I heard Greffham say, just as if he was rowing a fellow for awkwardness in saddling his horse: 'You clumsy idiot, what are you trembling for? Hang me, if I can see what there is to make a fuss about! I'll bet you a pound I tuck you up in ten minutes without any baggling. *Now*, you're right. Am I standing quite square?'

'You're all right, sir,' the man said respectfully. The drop fell, and poor Greffham (I can't help saying it, although he was a precious scoundrel) died without the least contrition. Showed perfectly good taste to the last. Deuced rum people one meets on a goldfield, don't you, now?

I suppose you're not likely to come this way again. We're not quite so jolly as we were. The Colonel has gone back to India. Old De Bracy has got a good Government appointment, for which he looks more suited than market gardening, though he was hard to beat at that, or anything he tackled. I hear you've made pots of money. Parklands was here the other day, and told me. I have a deuced good mind to turn squatter myself. My regards to old Frankston, and ask him if he remembers the last story I told him. Ha, ha!—Yours sincerely,

JOHN WILDER BRIGHT.

Now the great muster and delivery at Mildool was over and everyday life at Rainbar had again to be faced, Ernest began to feel like one Alexander, sometimes called Great, who had conquered his way into the kingdom of Ennui. He was the possessor of a fortune and of a bride, both above his utmost hopes, his loftiest aspirations; but he began to fear that he had lost that which leaves life very destitute of savour—he feared with a new and terrible dread that he had lost his Occupation!

For life seemed so much more easy, so much less necessary to take thought about, now that he had two stations than when he had but one—one likely to be wrested from him. So is it that Difficulty is oft our friend in disguise, Success but the veiled foe which smiles at our faltering footsteps and watches to destroy. He saw now, that with Jack Windsor at Mildool, and Charley Banks, alert, energetic, fully experienced, at Rainbar, his life henceforth would be that of a visitor, a supernumerary—unless indeed he employed his mind in the construction and organisation of 'improvements!' Ha, ha! 'Vade retro, Sathanas!' The Genie was safe immured in his brazen sealed-up vessel. There should he remain.

Still was there one 'improvement' in which he had never altogether lost faith, long and dispiriting as had been the divorce between formation and utility. This was the cutting the connecting channel between the Back Lake and the 'Outer

Lake.' Long had the 'master's ditch' been as useless as a fish-pond in the bosom of the Sahara, as a rose-garden in a glacier, as an oyster-bed in a steppe. Cattle had walked over it; grass had grown in it; stockmen and thoughtless souls had jeered at it, and at the English stranger who had thrown away upon its construction the money of which he possessed a quantity so greatly in excess of his apparent intelligence. As long as he remained the proprietor of the run, it would be hardly in keeping with the manner of the bush to call it 'Neuchamp's Folly.' But had failure or absence chanced to occur in his case, the satirical nomenclature would not have been deferred for a week. In the solitary rides and musings to which, in default of daily work and labour, Mr. Neuchamp was fain to betake himself, it chanced that he had repeatedly examined that portion of this great sheet of water, which rang with the whistling wings of wild fowl, and on breezy days surged with long rippling waves against its bank.

While in Sydney a number of back blocks, at no greater distance from this outer lake than it was from the former 'frontage,' had been put under offer to him. What if he should accept the terms—the price was low—and trust to the chance of the next great flood in the full-fed chafing river sending the water leaping down his tiny canal, and thus giving a value never before dreamed of to this splendidly grand but unnatural region. In spite of his half-settled determination to accept no other speculative risks, but, like a wise man, to rest contented with proved success, the next post conveyed instructions to Messrs. Paul Frankston and Co. to close for all the blocks, each five miles square, from A to M, comprising all the unoccupied country at the back of Rainbar and Mildool, at the price named.

On the following morning the weather was misty and unusually cloudy, with an apparent tendency to rain. No rain fell, however; but the raw air, the unusual bleakness of the atmosphere, seemed abnormal to Ernest Neuchamp.

'I should not wonder,' said Mr. Banks, in explanation, 'that it was raining cats and dogs somewhere else, snowing, or something of that sort. Perhaps at the head of the river. If that's the case, we shall have a flood and no mistake. Such a one as none of us has seen yet. However, we've neither hoof nor horn nor fleece on the frontage. It can't hurt us, that's one comfort.'

Mr. Banks's prognostications were correct. Within three days—

. . . like a horse unbroken,
When first he feels the rein,
The furious river struggled hard,
And tossed his tawny mane,
And burst the curb and bounded
Rejoicing to be free,
And whirling down in fierce career
Battlement and plank and pier,
Rushed headlong to the sea.

Battlement and plank and pier were in this case represented by hut slabs and rafters, haystacks and pumpkins, from the arable lands and meadows through which the great river held its upper course; while drowned stock and the posts and rails of many a mile of submerged fencing represented the latter floating trifles. There was much that was grand in the steadily deepening, broadening tide which slowly and remorselessly crawled over the wide green flats, which undermined the great waterworn precipices of the red-clayed bluffs, bringing down enormous fragments and masses, many tons in weight, which fell, foamed, and disappeared in the turbid, hurrying wave. Who could have recognised in this fierce, swollen, tyrant river, yellow as the Tiber, broad as the Danube, resistless as Ocean, the shallow, pellucid streamlet, rippling over its sandy shallows, of the dead, bygone famine year.

On the larger flats it was miles wide. The white, straight tree-trunks stood like colonnades with arches framed in foliage, disappearing in endless perspective above a limitless plain of gliding waters.

By night, as Mr. Neuchamp awoke in his cottage, which was built upon an elevation said by tradition to be above the reach of floods, the 'remorseless dash of billows' sounded distinctly, unpleasantly close in the darkness.

On the following day, the flood still continuing to rise, Piam-book was despatched to the Back Lake to report, and upon his return stated that 'water yan along that one picaninny blind creek like it Murray, make haste longer Outer Lake.' Full of hope and expectant of triumph, Mr. Neuchamp started out for 'Lake country,' accompanied by Mr. Banks.

When they arrived at the first lake the unusual fulness and volume of the water in that reservoir showed that the main stream must have been forced outwards along the course of the ancient, natural channel, by which in years of exceptional high floods—and in those years only—the lake had been filled.

Now, thought Mr. Neuchamp, the hour, long delayed, long doubted, has surely come. Who could have dreamed but a few short months since, when our very souls were adust and athirst with perennial famine, that our eyes should behold the sight which I see now? How should it teach us to hoard the garnered gold of truth, the 'eternal verity' in our heart of hearts! 'My lord delayeth his coming.' Was that held to be a reason, an excuse for the unfaithful, self-indulgent? Truly this would seem to some as great a miracle as the leaping water which followed the stroke of the prophet's staff in that other desert of which we read of old.

And now his eyes did actually behold the first trickling, wondrous motion of the brimming reservoir to advance, gravitation-led, along the narrow path to its far-distant sister lake. Slowly the full waters rose to the very lip of the vast natural cup or vase, and then, first saturating the entrance, poured

down the narrow outlet which the forecasting mind of man had prepared for it. It trickled, it flowed, it ran, it coursed, foaming and rushing, along the cutting, of which the fall at first exceeded that of the general passage. It was done! It was over! A proud success!

Charley Banks threw up his hat. Together they rode recklessly onward to the Outer Lake, and there Ernest Neuchamp enjoyed silently the deep satisfaction—then known but to the projector and inventor—of witnessing the waters of the Inner Lake, for the first time since the sea had ceased to murmur over these boundless levels, flow fast and flashing forward, driven by the pressure of the immense body behind, into the vast, deep, grass-clothed basin of the Outer Lake.

This was a triumph truly. For this alone it was worth while to have journeyed across the long, long ocean tide, to have toiled and suffered, waited and watched, to have eaten his heart with fear and sickening dread of the gaunt destroyer 'Ruin,' ever stalking nearer and nearer. This was true life—real adventure—the hazard and the triumph which alone constitute true manhood.

In the ecstasy of the moment Ernest Neuchamp forgot the fortune he had gained, the bride whom he had won, the home of his youth, the grand and glorious future, the not uneventful past. All things seemed as dreams and visions by the side of this grand and living Reality.

As he sat on his horse and gazed, still flowed the glorious wave into the century-dry basin by the channel which he, Ernest Neuchamp, had, in defiance of Nature, opinion, and society, conceived, formed, and successfully completed. Seasons might come and go; another dry time might come; the water might periodically evaporate and disappear,—but nothing could evade the great fact henceforth in the history of the land, that he had established the connection between the river and this distant, long-dry, unthought-of reservoir. There would be no more hint or menace of Neuchamp's Folly—more likely, Neuchamp's River.

Lake Neuchamp! Pshaw! it was an inland sea. Why not name it now? Why not render immortal, not his own perhaps ancient patronymic, but the lovely and beloved name of his soul's divinity? Now was the hour, the minute, when the virgin waters were falling for the first time in creation into the flower-besprinkled lap of the green earth before their eyes!

'Charley, my boy,' he said to Mr. Banks, 'take off your hat. Piambook, do liket me,' he said, removing his own. 'I name this water, now about to be filled for the first time within the memory of man, "Lake Antonia." So mote it be. Hip, hip, hurrah!' and the echoes of the waste rang to the unfamiliar sounds of the great British shout of welcome, of salutation, of battle-joy, of death-defiance, which England's friends and England's foes have had ere now just cause to know.

'Hurrah!' joined in Charley Banks with genuine feeling. 'By George! I never thought to see this sight—last year particularly; but, of course, we might have known it wasn't going to be dry always, as Levison said. We don't see far beyond our noses, most of us. But it *was* hard to conjure up any notion of a regular out-and-out waterfall like this with a twelvemonths' dust, and last year's burnt feed keeping as black as the day it took fire. I believe there will be thirty feet of water in this when it's full up, and it soon will be at this rate.'

'Budgerree tumble down water that one,' said Piambook. 'Old man blackfellow yabber, debil-debil, make a light here when he yan long that one scrub.'

Another occasion of congratulation awaited Mr. Neuchamp, the pleasure and pride accompanying which were perhaps only second in degree to the feelings inspired by the engineering triumph of Lake Antonia. His stud of Austral-Arabian horses had shared in the general advance and development of the property; they were now a perfect marvel of successful rearing.

He had them brought in daily from the sandhills near the plain where they ordinarily grazed, and passed hours in reviewing the colts and fillies, the yearlings, the mares and the foals. Every grade and stage, from the equine baby which gambolled and frisked by the side of its dam, to the well-furnished three-year-old filly—'Velut in latis equa trima campis ludit exsultim, metuitque tangi,'—all were satin-coated, sleek and round, fuller-fleshed, stronger, swifter; more riotously healthy could they not have been had they been fed with golden oats in an emperor's stable. Daintily now they picked the half-ripened tops from the fields of wild oats or barley which spread for leagues around. They drank of the pure clear waters of every pool and brooklet. They lay at night in the thickly-carpeted sandy knolls, and snuffed up the free desert breeze, fresh wafted from inmost sands or farthest seas. Partaking on one side of their parentage of the stately height and generous scope of their southern dams, culled from the noble race of island steeds which bear up the large frames of the modern Anglo-Saxon, they inherited a strong, perhaps overpowering infusion of the priceless blood of the courser of the desert. Their delicate heads, their wide nostrils, their adamantine legs, their perfect symmetry, all told of the ancient lineage of Omar the Keheilan, whose dam was Najima Sabeh or the Morning Star, of the strain Seglawee Dzedran, which, as every camel-driver of the Anezeh knows, dates back to El Kamsch, that glorious equine constellation, the five mares of Mahomet!

Here, again, was another instance of what Ernest could not but acknowledge gratefully as the generosity of Fate. Had but the season continued obdurate, his utter irrevocable ruin could not have been stayed. As a consequence, this stud, so precious, so profitable, so distinguished as it was apparently destined to

be (for Mr. Banks told him that numbers of offers had already been received for all available surplus stock, while the agent of a large dealer had implored him to put a price upon the whole stud), would doubtless have passed under the hammer as most unconsidered trifles, to be sneered at, scattered, for ever wasted and lost, as had been many a good fellow's pet stud ere now.

At length the day arrived when, having witnessed the satisfactory conclusion of every conceivable business duty and task which could be transacted at Rainbar or Mildool, Mr. Neuchamp took his place in the mail for Sydney, which city he had calculated to reach within a week of the dread ceremonial which was to seal his destiny. The coach did *not* break down or capsize, fracturing Mr. Neuchamp's leg in two places. The train fulfilled its appointed task, and the stern steam-giant did not select that opportunity for running off the rails or equalising angles. Something of the sort might have been reasonably expected to happen to a hero so near the rapturous denouement of the third volume, in which, indeed, every hero of average respectability is killed, mysteriously imprisoned, or married.

Mr. Neuchamp had undergone trials and troubles, risks and anxieties, losses and crosses; but the season of tribulation was for ever past for him. He had henceforth but to submit to the compulsory laurel crown, to the caresses of Fortune's favourite delegates, to listen to the plaudits of the crowd, to withstand the whispers and glances of beauty. He was now wise, beautiful, strong, and brave, a conqueror, an Adonis—in a word, he was *rich*!

He stood successful, and the world's praises, grudgingly bestowed upon struggling fortitude, were showered upon the obviously victorious speculator. All kinds of rumours went forth about him. His possessions were multiplied, so that Rainbar and Mildool stood sponsors for a tract of country about as large as from Kashgar to Khiva.

The canal was magnified into the dimensions of its namesake of Suez, and a trade was prophesied which would overshadow Melbourne and revolutionise Adelaide. He had contracted for the remount service for the whole Madras Presidency, such a matter being quite within the scope of his immense and high-bred studs. His herds of cattle were to supply Ballarat and Sandhurst with fat stock, and Melbourne buyers were on their way to secure everything he could deliver for the next two years! Ernest Neuchamp of Rainbar was the man of the day; the popular idol. Squatter though he might be, some of Jack Windsor's grateful utterances had been circulated, and a democratic but strongly appreciative and generous populace adored him. Portraits of Mr. Neuchamp and his faithful retainer, Jack Windsor, contending victoriously with a swarthy piratical crowd, led on by the Count with a cutlass and a belt full of

revolvers, appeared in the windows of the print-shops. Heroism and unselfish generosity, like murder, 'will out.'

Whether accidentally or otherwise, the Morahmee conflict had transpired. I make no reflections upon the well-known inviolable secrecy, which shrouds all post-nuptial communications. I content myself with stating a fact. Mr. Windsor was now a married man.

Ernest was at first annoyed, then surprised, lastly, unaffectedly amused, when a highly popular dramatic version of the incident appeared at the Victoria Theatre, wherein he was represented as defying the Count, and assuring him that 'berlood should flow from Morahmee Jetty to the South Head Lighthouse ere he relinquished the two maidens to his lawless grasp,' while Jack Windsor's representative, with a cabbage-tree hat and a hanging velvet band broad enough to make a sash for Carry, placed himself in an exaggerated, pugilistic attitude, and implored the foreign seamen to 'come on and confront on his own ground, by the shore of that harbour which was his country's pride, a true-born Sydney native!' This brought down the house, and occasioned Mr. Neuchamp such anguish of mind that he began to think Jermyn Croker not such a bad fellow after all, and to feel unkindly towards the great land and the warm-hearted people of his adoption.

Incapable of being stimulated by flattery into a false estimate of himself, these exaggerated symptoms of appreciation but pained him acutely; they disturbed his philosophical mind, ever craving for the performance of justice and intolerant of all lower standards of right.

As for Antonia Frankston, like most women, she was gratified by these tokens of the distinction which had been so profusely accorded to her hero. He was a hero who, in her eyes, though worthy of triumphs and processions, evaded his claims to such distinctions. He was too prone, she thought, to be over Scriptural in his social habitudes, and unless roused and incited, to take the lower rather than the higher seat at the board. Now that the people, wavering and impulsive, but still a mighty and tangible power, had endorsed and adopted him, Antonia's expansive mind recognised the brevet rank bestowed upon him. After all, had he not done much and dared greatly? Was it not well for the world to know it? If he was to be decorated, few deserved it more. So Antonia accepted serenely and in good faith the plaudits and universal flattery which now commenced to be showered upon the hero of her choice, the idol of her heart, the image of all written manhood.

The days which Mr. Neuchamp spent in Sydney after his return from Mildool and Rainbar were certainly more tedious than any which he had ever known in the pleasant city; but at length they passed away and were no more—strange thought! those atoms from the mighty mass of Time—drops from his flowing river—draughts, alas! quaffed or spilled from life's

golden chalice. They were past, faded, dead, irrevocably gone, as the days of the years before Pharaoh, before the shepherd kings, before the dawn of human life, Eden, or the first gleam of light which flashed upon a darkened, formless world!

Sad, pathetic even, is the death of a day! Its circling hours have known peace, joy, loving regard, social glee, charity, justice, mercy, repose. The allotted task has been done. The parents' smile, the wife's love, the babe's prattle, have all glorified earth during its short season. And now the day is done! its tiny term is over, lost in the shoreless sea of past immensities! The brightly inconstant orb shines tenderly on the new-born stranger, full of joyous hope or dread expectancy. Who can tell what this, the new and garish day, may bring forth? Let us weep for the loved fast-fading Child of Time, in whose golden tresses, at least, twined no cypress wreath.

Then, heralded by calm and cloudless hours, did the wondrous unit, the Day of Days, dawn for Ernest Neuchamp. Rarely—even in that matchless clime, where the too ardent sun alone may be blamed by the husbandman, rarely by the citizen or the tourist—did a more perfect, unrivalled, wondrous day steal rosy through the ocean mists, the folded vapours, to change into fretted gold and Tyrian dyes the tender tints of flushed dawn. All nature visibly, audibly rejoiced. The tiny wavelets murmured on the milk-white sands of the Morahmee beach, that their darling—she who loved them and talked with them in many a hushed eve, in many a solemn starry midnight—was this day to be wed. The strange foreign pines and flower trees of the Morahmee plantation, brought from many a distant land to please the lady of the mansion, echoed the sound as they waved to and fro with oriental languor and tropical mystery. The flowerets she daily tended turned imperceptibly their delicately various sheen of petals to each other and sighed the tender secret. With how many secrets are not the flowers entrusted? Have they not been sworn to silence since those days of the great dead empires, when the vows and pleadings, songs and laughter, beneath the rose-chaplets were sacred evermore?

Her gems, of which Antonia had great store—for there was more difficulty in preventing Paul from overlading her caskets than of replenishing them—even they knew it. They flashed and glittered, and reddened, and sent out green and purple light, for they are envious, hard, and remorseless of nature, as they noted the arrival of a bediamonded necklace, and a brooch outshining in splendour any of their rich and rare and very exclusive 'set.'

The pensioners, her dependants, of the house, among the humble, and the very poor, knew it and raised for her welfare the brief unstudied prayer which comes from a thankful heart. The poor, in ordinary acceptance, are, and have always been, in

Australia, difficult to discover and to distinguish. But to the earnest quest of the unaffectedly charitable, anxious to do good to soul or body, to succour the tempted, to help the needy, to save him that is ready to perish, worthy occasions of ministration have never been absent from the outskirts of every large city.

The forlorn spinster, friendless and forsaken, the overworked matron,—the shabby genteel sufferers too secure to starve, too poor to enjoy, too proud to complain, and, occasionally, what seemed to be an example of unmerciful disaster,—among these were the rich maiden's unobtrusive but unremittingly performed good works, of which none heard, none knew, but the recipients, and perhaps the discreetest of co-workers.

And thus, with the day just dawned, had the maiden life of Antonia Frankston come to an end. From this day forth her being was to merge in that of one who, falling with the suddenness of a shipwrecked mariner into their society, had been, as would have been such a waif, treated with every friendly office, with the ample upspringing kindness of a princely heart, by her fond father. That father, no mean judge of his fellow-man, had seen in his early career but the noble errors of a lofty nature and an elevated ideal. Such disproportions between judgment and experience but prove the natural dignity of the mind as fully as the precocious wisdom of the gutter-bred urchin waif, his base descent and companionship.

Paul Frankston had long foreseen that, when the lessons of life should have cleared the encrustation from the character of his *protégé*, it would shine forth bright and burnished as Toledo steel—all-sufficient for defence, nay, equal to spirited attack, should such need arise. He saw that the future possessor and guardian of his soul's treasure was a 'man' as well as a 'gentleman.' On both of these essentials he laid great weight. For the rest, his principles were high and unfaltering, his habits unimpeachable. Whatever trifling defects there might be in his character were merely such as were incident to mortality. They must be left to the influence of time, experience, and of Antonia.

'If she doesn't turn him out a perfect article,' said Paul, unconsciously quitting the mental for the actual soliloquy, 'why nothing and no one can. If I had been any one else, and she had commenced early enough at me, I really believe that she'd have changed old Paul Frankston into a bishop, or, at any rate, a rural dean at least; even Charley Carryall—'

But whether Captain Carryall's utterances and anecdotes were scarcely of a nature calculated to harmonise with bishops and deans, or whether Mr. Frankston's many engagements at this important crisis suddenly engaged his attention, can never be known with that precision which this chronicler is always anxious to supply. One thing only is certain, that he looked

at his watch, and hastily arising from his arm-chair, departed into the city.

For the information of a section of readers for whom we feel much respect and gratitude, it may be mentioned that the wedding took place at St. James's, a venerable but architecturally imperfect pile in the vicinity of Hyde Park. There be churches near Morahmee more replete with 'miserable sinners' in robes of Worth and garments of Poole, but Mr. Frankston would none of them. In the old church had he stood beside his mother, a schoolboy, wondering and wearied, but acquiescent, after the manner of British children; in the old church had he plighted his troth to Antonia's sainted mother; in the old church should his darling utter her vows, and in no other. Are there any words which can fitly interpret the deep joy and endless thankfulness which fill the heart and humble the mind of him who, all unworthy, knows that the chalice of life's deepest joy is even then past all risk and danger, steadily uplifted to his reverent lips?

Doubts there have been, delays that fretted, fears that shook the soul, clouds that dimmed, darkness that hid the sky of love. All these have sped. Here is naught but the glad and gracious Present, that blue and golden day which, pardoning and giving amnesty to the Past, beseeches, wellnigh assures, the stern veiled form of the Future.

Some of these reflections would doubtless have mingled with the contemplations of Ernest Neuchamp at Aurora's summons on that glad morn but for an unimportant fact—that he was at that well-known poetical period most soundly asleep.

Restlessly wakeful during the earlier night watches, he slept heavily at length, and only awoke, terrible to relate, with barely time for a careful toilet. Hastily disposing of a cup of coffee and a roll, he betook himself, in company with Mr. Parklands, who, I grieve to relate, had been playing loo all night, and was equally late and guilty, to the ancient church, where they were, by the good fortune of Parklands' watch being rather fast—like all his movements—exactly, accurately the canonical five minutes before the time. Both of the important personages, being secretly troubled, looked slightly, becomingly pale. But the pallor of Parklands, entirely due to an unprosperous week, involving heavier disbursements and later sittings than ordinary, told much in his favour with the bridesmaids, so much so that he always averred, in his customary irreverent speech, that 'his flint was fixed' on the occasion.

Probably owing to the calmly superior aspect of Mr. Hartley Selmore, or the tonic supplied by Jermyn Croker's patent disapprobation and contempt of the whole proceedings, the protagonist and his acolouthos went through the ordeal with that exact proportion of courage, reverence, deftness, and satisfaction, the full rendering of which is often hard upon him who

makes necessarily 'a first appearance.' As for Antonia's loveliness on that day, when, radiant, white-robed, and serene, she placed her hand in that of her lover, and greeted him with the trustful smile in which the virgin-soul shines out o'er the maiden-bride's countenance, Ernest Neuchamp may be pardoned for thinking that the angel of his dreams had been permitted to visit the earth, to rehearse for his especial joy a premature beatific vision.

Mr. Parklands effected a sensation by dropping the bridal-ring, but as he displayed much quickness of eye and manual dexterity in regaining it, the incident had rather a beneficial effect than otherwise. Everything was happily concluded, even to the kissing of the bridesmaids, Mr. Parklands, with his usual energy and daring, having insisted on carrying out personally that pleasing portion of the programme, supposed to appertain of right to the holder of the ancient and honourable office of groomsman. This compelled the chasing of two unwilling damsels half-way down the aisle, after which the slightly scandalised spectators quitted the church, while the wedding guests betook themselves to Morahmee.

There, as they arrived, Mr. Frankston, sweeping the bay mechanically with long-practised eye, exclaimed, 'What boat is that heading for our jetty at such a pace?—a whaleboat, too, with a Kanaka crew. There's a tall man with the steer oar in his fist; by Jove! it's Charley Carryall for a thousand.'

And that cheerful mariner and successful narrator it proved to be when the weather-beaten boat came foaming up to the little pier, drawn half out of the water by her wild-looking, long-haired crew, encouraged by their captain, who was backing up the stroke as if an eighty-barrel whale depended upon their speed.

'Frantically glad to see you, Charley, my boy,' shouted Paul; 'never hoped for such luck; the only man necessary to make the affair perfect—absolutely perfect. Isn't he, Antonia? But how did you guess what we were about, and yet here in time? I see the old *Banksia* is only creeping up the harbour now.'

'*That* guided me,' said the Captain, pointing to the profusely decorated Morahmee flagstaff—an invariable adjunct to a marine villa. 'I was sure all that bunting wasn't up for anything short of Antonia's wedding. So I dressed and came away. The operculums I was bringing our little girl here will just come in appropriately. They're the first any of you have seen, I daresay.'

The faintly subdued tone which is usual and natural in the pre-banquet stage could not be reasonably protracted after the first fusillade of Paul's wonderful Pommery and Veuve Clicquot, Steinberger and Roederer.

The guests were many and joyous, the day brilliant, the occasion fortunate and mirth-inspiring, the entertainment un-

paralleled, and henceforth proverbial in a city of sumptuous and lavish hospitality.

Small wonder, then, that the merriment was as free and unconstrained as the welcome was cordial, and the banquet regal in its costly profusion. How the jests circulated! how the silvery laughter rang! how the bright eyes sparkled! how the fair cheeks glowed! how the soft breeze whispered love! how the blue wave murmured joy!

Did not Mr. Selmore propose the health of the bride and bridegroom with such pathetic eloquence that the uninstructed were doubtful as to whether he was Antonia's uncle or Mr. Neuchamp's father? He referred to the mingled energy, foresight, acuteness, and originality displayed by his valued, and, he might add, distinguished friend Ernest Neuchamp. By utilising qualities of the highest order, joined with information always yielded, he was proud to say, by himself and other pioneers, he had achieved an unequalled but, he must add, a most deserved success, which placed him in the front rank of the pastoral proprietors of New South Wales.

Any one would have imagined from Mr. Hartley Selmore's benevolent flow of eulogy that he had carefully nursed the infancy of Mr. Neuchamp's fortunes instead of ruthlessly endeavouring to strangle the tender nursling. He himself, by means of luck and much discount, had managed to hang on, ostensible proprietor of his numerous stations, until the tide turned. Now he was a wealthy man, and needed not to call the governor of the Bank of England his cousin.

With prosperity his character and estimation had much improved. There were those yet who said he was an unprincipled, remorseless old humbug, and would none of him. But in a general way he was acceptable; popular, in private and in public. His natural talents were great; his acquirements above the average; his manner irresistible; it was no one's particular interest or business to bring him to book,—so he dined and played billiards at the clubs, buttonholed officials, and greeted illustrious strangers, as if the greater portion of the pastoral interior of Australia belonged to him, or as though he were one of the Conscript Fathers, distinguished for an excess of Roman virtues, of this rising nation.

Mr. Parklands indeed desired to throw some missile at him for his 'cheek,' as he confided to a young lady with sensational blue eyes, but desisted from that practical criticism upon being implored by his fair neighbour not to think of it, for her sake, and that of the ladies generally. The speaker was pretty enough to speak with authority, and so Hartley, like other fortunate conspirators and oppressors, departed in triumph, with the plaudits and congratulations of the unthinking public. For the rest, the affair went off much as such society fireworks do. Augusta Neuchamp, in a Paris dress, looked so extremely well that Jermyn Croker congratulated himself warmly, and mingled

such vitriolic scintillations with his pleasantries, that every one was awed into admiration. The mail steamer was to sail in a few days, and he flattered himself that he had contrived a surprise for all his friends, which should contain an element of ignoring contempt so complete in conception and execution, that his departure from the colony should faithfully reflect the opinions and convictions formed during his residence in it.

Having, after considerable hesitation, finally determined to enter upon the frightfully uncertain adventure of matrimony, he had offered himself and heart, such as it was, in marriage to Miss Augusta, with many apologies for the apparent necessity of the ceremony being performed in a colony. That young lady had endeared herself to Mr. Croker by her unsparing criticisms, by her ceaseless discontent with all things Australian, by her unmistakable air of *ton* and distinction. He did not entirely overlook her possession of a moderate but assured income.

With his customary disregard for the feelings of others, he had insisted upon being married, without the usual time-honoured ceremonies and concomitants, on the morning upon which the mail steamer started for Europe. By going on board directly afterwards, the Sydney people would be precluded from hearing of the event until after their departure; while their fellow-passengers, most of them strangers, would be ignorant as to whether the newly-married couple were of a week's date or of six months.

This arrangement, in which he had no great difficulty in persuading Miss Augusta to acquiesce, would have excellently answered Mr. Croker's unselfish expectations but for one circumstance, which he doubtless noted to the debit of colonial wrongs and shortcomings—he had neglected to procure the co-operation of the elements.

No sooner had the ceremony, unwitnessed save by Paul Frankston and Mr. and Mrs. Neuchamp, taken place, and the happy pair been transferred to the *Nubia*, their luggage having been safely deposited in that magnificent ocean steamer days before,—no sooner had the great steamer neared the limit of the harbour, when a southerly gale, an absolute hurricane, broke upon the coast with such almost unprecedented fury that till it abated no sane commander of the Peninsular and Oriental Company's service would have dreamed of quitting safe anchorage.

For three days the 'tempest howled and wailed,' and most uncomfortably the *Nubia* lay at anchor, safe but most uneasy, and, as she was rather crank, rolling and pitching nearly as wildly as she could have done in the open sea.

It so chanced that one of Mr. Croker's few weak points was an extraordinarily extreme susceptibility to *mal de mer*. On all occasions upon which he had cleared the Heads, for years past, he had suffered terribly. But never since his first outward-bound experience in early life had he suffered torments, pros-

tration, akin to this. He lay in his cabin death-like, despairing, wellnigh in collapse.

Miss Neuchamp, in spite of her much travelling, was always a martyr during the first week of a voyage, if the weather chanced to be bad. Now it certainly was bad, very bad; and in consequence Miss Augusta lay, under the charge of a stewardess, in a stern cabin, wellnigh sick unto death, heedless of life and its chequered presentments, and as oblivious, not to say indifferent, to the fate of Jermyn Croker as if she had yesterday sworn to love and obey the chief officer of the *Nubia*.

This was temporary anguish, mordant and keen, doubtless. But Time, the healer, would certainly in a few days have set it straight. The fact of an unknown lady and gentleman being indisposed at the commencement of the voyage afflicts nobody. But here was apparently the finger of the fiend. A ruffianly pilot, coming off in his hardy yawl, brought on board a copy of the *Sydney Morning Herald* of the day following their attempted departure, in which it was duly set forth how, at St. James's Church, by Canon Druid, Jermyn, second son of Crusty Croker, Esq., of Crankleye Hall, Cornwall, was then and there married to Augusta, only daughter of the Rev. Cyril Neuchamp, incumbent of Neuchamp-Barton, Buckinghamshire, England. Now the joke was out. Even under such unpromising circumstances it told. Here were two mortals, passionately devoted of course, and in that state of matrimonial experience when all things tend to the wildest overrating, so cast down, so utterly prostrated by the foul Sea Demon, that they positively did not care a rush for each other. The great Jermyn lay, faintly ejaculating 'Steward, Ste-w-a-ar-d,' at intervals, and making neither lament nor inquiry about his similarly suffering bride. As for Augusta, she had scarce more strength of body or mind than permitted her to moan out, 'I shall die, I shall die;' and apparently, for all she cared, in that unreal, phantasmal, pseudo-existence, which only was not death, though more dreadful, Jermyn Croker might have fallen overboard, or have been changed into a Seedee stoker. Then for this to happen to Jermyn Croker, of all people! The humour of the situation was inexhaustible!

And though the fierce south wind departed and the *Nubia* drove swiftly majestic across the long seas that part Cape Otway from the stormy Leuwin, though in due time the spice-laden gales blew 'soft from Ceylon's isle,' and the savage peaks of Aden, the lofty summit of the Djebel Moussa rose to view in the grand succession of historical landscapes; yet to the last day of the voyage a stray question in reference to the precise effects of very bad cases of sea-sickness would be directed, as to persons of proved knowledge and experience, to Mr. and Mrs. Jermyn Croker, by their fellow-passengers.

It is due to Mr. Croker, as a person of importance, to touch

lightly upon his after career. His wife discovered too late that in reaching England he had only changed the theme upon which his universal depreciations were composed. 'Non animam sed cœlum mutant qui trans mare currunt.' He abused the climate and the people of England with a savage freedom only paralleled by his Australian practice. Becoming tired of receiving 3 or 4 per cent for his money, he one day, in a fit of wrath, embarked one-half of his capital in a somewhat uncertain South American loan. His cash was absorbed, to reappear spasmodically in the shape of interest, of which there was little, while of principal it soon became apparent that there would be none.

Reduced to the practice of marked though not distressing economy, Mr. Croker enjoyed the peculiar pleasure which is yielded to men of his disposition, of witnessing the possession of luxuries by others and a style of living which they are debarred from emulating. He was gladdened, too, by the occasional vision of an Australian with more money than he could spend, who rallied him upon his grave air, and bluntly asked why he was such a confounded fool as to sell out just as prices were really rising. Finally, to aggravate his sufferings, long unendurable by his own account, Mr. Parklands had the effrontery to come home, and, in the very neighbourhood where he, Croker, was living for economy, to buy a large estate which happened to be for sale.

The unfailing flow of the new proprietor's high spirits, his liberal ways, and frank manners, combined with exceptional straight going in the hunting-field, rendered him immensely popular, as indeed he had always contrived to be wherever fate and speculation led his roving steps. But it may be questioned whether his brother colonist ever saw his old friend spinning by behind a blood team, or heard of his being among the select few in a 'quick thing,' without fulminating one of his choicest anathemas, comprehending at once the order to which he and Parklands had belonged, the country they had quitted, and the one in which they now sojourned.

Mr. Banks remained in the employment of Mr. Neuchamp at Rainbar until, having saved and acquired by guarded investment a moderate capital, he had a tempting offer of joining, as junior partner, in the purchase of a large station in new country. Always a good-looking, manly fellow, he managed to secure the affections of a niece of Mr. Middleton, whom he met on one of his rare trips to Sydney, and, before he left for the Tadmor Downs, Lower Barcoo, they were married.

Mr. Joe Freeman had employed some of the compulsory leisure time rendered necessary during his fulfilment of the residence clause for Mr. Levison, in an exhaustive study of the Crown Lands Alienation Act. From that important statute (20 Vic. No. 7, sec. 13) he discovered that, provided a man had children enough, there is but little limit to the quantity of the

country's soil that he can secure and occupy at a rate of expenditure singularly small and favourable to the speculative 'landist' of the period.

Thus Joe Freeman, after considerable ciphering, made out that he could 'take up' for himself and his three younger children a total of twelve hundred and eighty acres of first-class land! He had determined that as long as there was an alluvial flat in the colony his choice should not consist of *bad* land. Added to this would be a pre-emptive grazing right of three times the extent. This would come to three thousand eight hundred and forty acres, which, added to the freehold of twelve hundred and eighty acres, gave a total of five thousand one hundred and twenty acres. The entire use of this territory he could secure by a payment of five shillings per acre for the *freehold portion only*—say, three hundred and twenty pounds.

Of course his three children were compelled, by law, to reside on their selections. As two of these were under five years old, some difficulty in the carrying out of the apparently stringent section No. 18 might be anticipated.

This difficulty was utterly obliterated by building his cottage *exactly* upon the intersecting lines of the four half-sections, thus:



By this clever contrivance Mary Ellen, the baby, as well as Bob, aged three years, were 'residing upon their selections' when they were in bed at night, inasmuch as that haven of rest (for the other members of the family) was carefully placed across the south line which divided the estates.

Nor was this all. Bill Freeman took up a similar quantity of land in precisely the same way, locating it about a mile from his brother's selection, so that as it was clearly not worth any other selector's while to come between them, they would probably have the use of another section or two of land for nothing. The squatter on whose run this little sum was worked out was a struggling, burdened man, unable to buy out or borrow. He was ruined. But the individual, in all ages, has suffered for the State.

Mr. Neuchamp's Australian career had now reached a point when life, however heroic, is generally conceded to be less adventurous. His end, in a literary sense, is near. We feel bound in honour, however, to add the information, that upon the assurance of Mr. Frankston that they could not leave New South Wales temporarily at a more prosperous time, Ernest Neuchamp resolved once more to tempt the main, and to taste

the joy of revisiting, with his Australian bride, his ancestral home.

Having taken the precaution to call a council of the most eminent floriculturists of flower-loving Sydney to his aid, he procured and shipped a case of orchidaceous plants, second to none that had ever left the land, for the delectation of his brother Courtenay. He had long since paid the timely remittance which had so lightened his load of anxiety in the 'dry season' at Rainbar, with such an addition of 'colonial interest' as temporarily altered the views of the highly conservative senior as to the soundness of Australian securities.

Upon the genuine delight which Antonia experienced when the full glory of British luxury, the garnered wealth of a thousand years, burst upon her, it is not necessary here to dilate, nor, after a year's continental travel, upon the rejoicings which followed the birth of Mr. Courtenay Frankston Neuchamp at the hall of his sires. His uncle immediately foresaw a full and pleasing occupation provided for his remaining years, in securing whatever lands in the vicinity of Neuchampstead might chance to be purchaseable. They would be needed for the due territorial dignity of a gentleman, who, upon his accession to the estate, would probably have thirty or forty thousand a year additional to the present rental, to spend on one of the oldest properties in the kingdom.

'He himself,' he said, 'was unhappily a bachelor. He humbly trusted so to remain, but he was proud and pleased to think that the old House would once more be worthily represented. He had never seen the remotest possibility of such a state of matters taking place in his own time, and had never dreamed, therefore, of the smallest self-assertion.

'The case was now widely different. The cadet of the House, against, he would frankly own, his counsel and opinion, had chosen to seek his fortune on distant shores, as had many younger sons unavailingly. He had not only found it, but had returned, moreover, with the traditional Princess, proper to the King's younger son, in all legends and romances. In his charming sister he recognised a princess in her own right, and an undeniable confirmation of his firmly-held though not expressed opinion, that his brother Ernest's enthusiasm had always been tempered by a foundation of prudence and unerring taste.'

Again in his native land, in his own county, Antonia had to submit to the lionisation of her husband, who came to be looked upon as a sort of compromise between Columbus and Sir Walter Raleigh, with a dash of Francis Drake. The very handsome income which the flourishing property of Rainbar and Mildool, *cum* Back-blocks A to M, and the unwearying rainy seasons and high markets, permitted him to draw, was magnified tenfold. His liberal expenditure gratified the taste of the lower class, among whom legends involving romantic discoveries and annexations of goldfields received ready credence.

Mr. Ernest Neuchamp was courteously distinguished by the county magnates, popular among the country gentlemen who had been his friends and those of his family from his youth, and the idol of the peasantry, who instinctively discerned, as do children and pet animals, that he viewed them with a sympathetic and considerate regard.

When Mrs. Ernest Neuchamp, of Neuchampstead, was presented to her Gracious Sovereign by 'the Duchess,' that exalted lady deigned to express high approval of her very delicately beautiful and exquisitely apparelled subject from the far southern land, and to inquire if all Australian ladies were so lovely and so sweet of aspect and manner as the very lovely young creature she saw before her. The Court Circular was unprecedentedly enthusiastic; and in very high places was Ernest assured that he was looked upon as having conferred lustre upon his order and benefits upon his younger countrymen, to whom he had exhibited so good and worthy an example.

All this panegyrical demonstration Ernest Neuchamp received not unsuitably, but with much of his old philosophical calmness of critical attitude. What he really had 'gone out into the wilderness' to see, and to do, he reflected he had neither seen nor done. What he found himself elevated to high places for doing, was the presumable amassing of a large fortune, a proceeding popular and always favourably looked upon. But this was only a secondary feature in his programme, and one in which he had taken comparatively little interest. He could not help smiling to himself with humorous appreciation of the satiric pleasantry of the position, conscious also that his depreciation of great commercial shrewdness and boldness in speculation was held to be but the proverbial modesty of a master mind; while the interest which he could not restrain himself from taking in plans for the weal and progress of his old friend and client, Demos, was considered to be the dilettante distraction with which, as great statesmen take to wood chopping or poultry rearing, the mighty hunter, the great operator of the trackless waste, like Garibaldi at Caprera, occupied himself. It was hardly worth while doing battle with the complimentary critics, who would insist upon crediting him with all the sterner virtues of their ideal colonist—a great and glorious personage who combined the autocracy of a Russian with the *savoir faire* of a Parisian, the energy of an Englishman with the instinct of a Parsee and the rapidity of an American; after a while, no doubt, they would find out their god to have feet of clay. He would care little for that. But, in the meanwhile, no misgivings mingled with their enthusiastic admiration. The younger son of an ancient house, which possessed historic claims to the consideration of the county, had returned laden with gold, which he scattered with free and loving hand. That august magnate 'the Duke' had (vicariously, of course—he had

long lost the habit of personal action save in a few restricted modes) to look to his laurels. There was danger, else, that his old-world star would pale before this newly-arisen constellation, bright with the fresher lustre of the Southern Cross.

All these admitted luxuries and triumphs notwithstanding, a day came when both Ernest Neuchamp, and Antonia his wife, began to approach, with increasing eagerness and decision, the question of return. In the three years which they had spent 'at home' they had, they could not conceal from themselves, exhausted the resources of Britain—of Europe—in their present state of sensation.

Natural as was such a feeling in the heart of Antonia, with whom a yearning for her birthland, her childhood's home, for but once again to hear the sigh of the summer wave from the verandah at Morahmee, was gradually gaining intensity, one wonders that Ernest Neuchamp should have fully shared her desire to return. Yet such was undoubtedly the fact.

Briton as he was to the core, he had, during the third year of their furlough, been often impatient, often aweary, of an aimless life—that of a gazer, a spectator, a dilettante. Truth to tell, the strong free life of the new world had unfitted him for an existence of a mere reciprocity.

A fox-hunter, a fisherman, a fair shot, and a lover of coursing, he yet realised the curious fact that he was unable to satisfy his personal needs by devoting the greater portion of his leisure to these recreations, perfect in accessories and appointments, unrivalled in social concomitants, as are these kingly sports when enjoyed in Britain.

Passionately fond of art, a connoisseur, and erstwhile an amateur of fair attainment, a haunter of libraries, a discriminating judge of old editions and rare imprints, he yet commenced to become impatient of days and weeks so spent. Such a life appeared to him now to be a waste of time. In vain his brother Courtenay remonstrated.

'I feel, my dear Courtenay, and it is no use disguising the truth to you or to myself, that I can no longer rest content in this little England of yours. It is a snug nest, but the bird has flown over the orchard wall, his wings have swept the waste and beat the foam; he can never again, I fear, dwell there, as of old; never again, I fear.'

'But why, in the name of all that is exasperating and eccentric, can you not be quiet, and let well alone?' asked Courtenay, not without a flavour of just resentment. 'You have money; an obedient, utterly devoted father-in-law, of a species unknown in Britain; a charming wife, who might lead me like a bear, were I so fortunate as to have been appropriated by her; troops of friends, I might almost say admirers—for you must own you are awfully overrated in the county. What in the wide world can urge you to tempt fortune by re-embarkation and this superfluous buccaneering?'

'I suppose it is vain to try and knock it out of your old head, Courtenay, that there is no more buccaneering in New South Wales than in old South Wales. But, talking of buccaneers, I suppose I *am* like one of old Morgan's men who had swung in a West Indian hammock, and seen the sack of Panama ; thereafter unable to content himself in his native Devon.

'You might as well have asked of old Raoul de Neuchamp to go back and make cider in Normandy, after he had fought shoulder to shoulder with Taillefer and Rollo at Hastings, and tasted the stern delight of harrying Saxon Franklins and burning monasteries. I have found a land where deeds are to be done, and where conquest, though but of the forces of Nature, is still possible. Here in this happy isle your lances are only used in the tilt-yard and tournament, your swords hang on the wall, your armour is rusty, your knights fight but over the wine-cup, your ladye-loves are ever in the bowers. With us, across the main, still the warhorse carries mail, the lances are not headless, and many a shrewd blow on shield and helmet rings still.

'I am in the condition of "The Imprisoned Huntsman"—

'My hawk is tired of perch and hood,
My idle greyhound loathes his food,
My steed is weary of his stall,
And I am sick of captive thrall ;
I would I were, as I have been,
Hunting the roe in forest green,
With bended bow and bloodhound free,
For that is the life that is meet for me.'

'I know from experience that it is as probable that a star should come down from the sky and do duty in the kitchen grate,' said Courtenay Neuchamp sardonically, 'as that you should listen to any one's opinion but your own, or I would suggest that the falcon, and greyhound, and steed business is better if not exclusively performed in this hemisphere. I never doubted you would go your own road. But what does Antonia say to leaving the land of court circulars and Queen's drawing-rooms and Paris bonnets fresh once a week ?'

'She says'—and here Mrs. Neuchamp crept up to her husband's side and placed her hand in his—'that she is tired of Paradise—tired of perfect houses, unsurpassable servants and dinners, drives and drawing-rooms, lawn parties and archery meetings, the Academy and the Park, Belgravia and South Kensington—in fact, of everything and everybody except Neuchampstead and dear old Courtenay. She wants, like some one else, to go out into the world again, a real world, and not a sham one like the one in which rich people live in England. She is *living*, not life. Perhaps I am "*un peu* Zingara"—who knows ? It's a mercy I am not very dark, like some other Australians I

have seen. But it is now the time to say, my dear Courtenay, that Ernest and I have grown tired of play, and want to go back to that end of the world where work grows.'

'Please don't smother me with wisdom and virtue,' pleaded Courtenay, with a look of pathetic entreaty. 'I know we are very ignorant and selfish, and so on, in this old-fashioned England of ours. I really think I might have become a convert and a colonist myself, if taken up early by a sufficiently zealous and prepossessing missionaress. I feel now that it is too late. Club worship is with me too strongly ingrained in my nature. Clubs and idols are closely connected, you know. But are we never to meet again?' and here the rarely changed countenance of Courtenay Neuchamp softened visibly.

'We will have another look at you in late years,' said Antonia softly; 'perhaps we may come altogether when—when—we are old.'

'I think I may promise that,' said Mr. Neuchamp. 'When Frank is old enough to set up for himself at Morahmee, with an occasional trip to Rainbar and Mildool, to keep himself from forgetting how to ride, then I think we may possibly make our last voyage to the old home, in preparation for that journey on which I trust we three may set forth at periods not very distantly divided.'

The brothers shook hands silently. Antonia bestowed a sister's kiss upon the calm brow of the elder brother, and quitted the room. No more was said. But all needful preparations were made, and ere the autumn leaves had commenced to fall from the aged woods which girdled Neuchampstead, the *Massilia* was steaming through the Straits of Bonifacio with Ernest Neuchamp watching the snowy mountain-tops of Corsica, while Antonia alternately enlivened the baby Frank or dipped into *The Crescent and the Cross*, which she had long intended to read over again in a leisurely and considerate manner.

But little remains to tell of the after life of Ernest Neuchamp. Settled once more in 'the sunny land,' he found his time fully and not unworthily occupied in the superintendence of his extensive properties and investments. There was much necessary journeying between Rainbar and Morahmee, at which latter place Paul Frankston had insisted upon their taking up their permanent abode. 'I am going down hill,' he said; 'the old house will be yours when I am gone; why should I sit here lonely in my age while my darling and her children are so near me? Don't be afraid of the nursery-racket bothering me. Every note of their young voices is music in my ears, being what they are.' So in Ernest's absence in the bush, or during the sitting of the House of Assembly—having from a stern sense of duty permitted himself to be elected as the representative of the electoral district of Lower Oxley—Antonia had a guardian and a companion. She resolved upon making the journey to Rainbar,

indeed, in order that she might fully comprehend the nature of the life which her husband had formerly led. During her stay she formed a tolerably fair estimate of the value of the property, being a lady of an observing turn of mind, and possessing by inheritance a hitherto latent tendency towards the management of affairs not generally granted to the sex. She visited Lake Antonia, and warmly congratulated Mr. Neuchamp upon that grand achievement. She patted Osmund and Ben Bolt, now bordering on the dignity of pensioners. She drove over to Mrs. Windsor's cottage at Mildool, where she found Carry established as rather a *grande dame*, with the general approbation of the district and of all the tourists and travellers who shared the proverbial hospitality of Mildool. She caused the stud to be driven in for inspection, when she had sufficient presence of mind to choose a pair of phaeton horses for herself out of them. But she told her husband that she could not perceive any advantage to be derived from living at Rainbar as long as their income maintained its present average, and that he could manage the interesting but exceedingly warm and isolated territory equally well by proxy.

Jack Windsor, upon Mr. Banks's promotion and marriage, became manager of the whole consolidated establishment, with a proportionate advance in salary. He developed his leading qualities of shrewdness and energy to their fullest capacity under the influence of prosperity. Being perfectly satisfied with his position and duties, having a good home, a contented wife, the means of educating his large family, the respect of the whole country-side, and the habit of saving a large portion of his liberal salary, beside an abundance of the exact species of occupation and exercise which suited him, it is not probable that he will make any attempt to 'better himself.' It is not certain that Mrs. Windsor would not favour the investment of their savings in property 'down the country' for the sake of the children, etc.; but Jack will not hear of it. 'I should feel first-rate,' he says scornfully, 'shouldn't I, in a place of my own, with a man and a boy, and forty or fifty head of crawling cattle to stare at while they were getting fit for market? That's not my style. It wouldn't suit any of us—not you either, old woman, to be poking about, helping at the wash-tub or something, or peelin' potatoes for dinner. We couldn't stand it after the life we've had here. I couldn't do without half-a-dozen stabled hacks and a lot of smart men to keep up to the mark. Give me something *big* to work at, done well, and paying for good keep and good spending all round. Five hundred and forty head of fat cattle cut out in two days like the last Mildool lot, and all the country-side at the muster—that's John Windsor's style—none of your Hawkesbury corn-shelling, butter-and-eggs racket. You ought to have married old Homminey, Carry, if that's what you wanted. Besides, after thinking and saving and driving up to high

pressure for the master so long, it would feel unnatural-like to be only working for myself.' So the argument was settled. Mr. Windsor had, it seems, tasted too fully of the luxury of power and command to relinquish it for humble independence.

The undisputed sway over a large staff of working hands, the unquestioned control of money and credit, within certain limits, had become with him more and more an indispensable habitude. Accustomed to the tone of the leader and the centurion, he could not endure the thought of changing his wide eventful life into the decorous dulness of the small landed proprietor. Mrs. Windsor, too, who dressed exceedingly well, and was admitted on equal terms to the society of the district, a position which, from her tact, good sense, and extremely agreeable appearance, she suitably filled and fully deserved, would probably, as her husband forcibly explained, have felt the change almost as much as himself. So Mr. Neuchamp was spared the annoyance of looking out for a new manager.

Hardy Baldacre accumulated a very large fortune, but was prevented, in middle life, from proving the exact amount of coin and property which may be amassed by the consistent practice of grinding parsimony, combined with an elimination of all the literary, artistic, social, and sympathetic tendencies. He habitually condemned the entire section, under the fatal *affiche* of 'don't pay.' To the surprise—we cannot with accuracy affirm, to the regret—of the general public, this very extensive proprietor fell a victim to a fit of *delirium tremens*, supervening upon the practice of irregular and excessive alcoholism. Into this vice of barren minds, the pitiless economist, guilty of so few other recreations, was gradually but irresistibly drawn.

The *White Falcon* fled far and fast with the fugitive noble, whose debts added the keenest edge among his late friends and creditors to the memory of his treasons. He escaped, with his usual good fortune, the civil and criminal tentacula in which the dread octopus of the law would speedily have enveloped him. He laughed at British and Australian warrants. But passing into one of the Dutch Indian settlements, he was sufficiently imprudent to pursue there also the same career of reckless expenditure. By an accident his character was disclosed, and his arrest effected at the moment of premeditated flight. A severe logic, learned in the strict commercial schools of Holland, where debt meets with no favour, guards the commerce of her intertropical colonies. The *White Falcon* was promptly seized and sold to satisfy a small portion of the princely liabilities of the owner, while for long years, in a dreary dungeon, like another and a better sea-rover, Albert von Schätterheims was doomed to eat his heart in the darksome solitude of an ignoble and hopeless captivity.

The Freeman family prospered in a general sense. Abraham

Freeman settled down upon a comfortable but not over fertile farm in the neighbourhood of Bowning. The thickness of the timber, and the conversion of much of it into fencing rails, served to provide him with occupation, and therefore with good principles, as Tottie saucily observed, to his life's end. That high-spirited damsel grieved much at first over the slowness and general fuss about trifles, which, after her extended experience, seemed to her to characterise the whole district, but was eventually persuaded by a thriving young miller that there were worse places to reside in. He was resolute, however, in forbidding the carrying of bags of flour, and as she was provided with a smart buggy and unlimited bonnets, her taste for adventurous excitement became modified in time, and the black ambling mare was handed over to the boys.

William and Joe Freeman made much money by nomadic agrarianism. After years passed in arduously constructing sham improvements and 'carrying out the residence clause,' with no intention of residing, they found themselves able to purchase a station.

Having paid down a large sum in cash, they entered into possession of their property with feelings of much self-gratulation, as being now truly squatters, just as much so, indeed, as Mr. Neuchamp, who had thought himself so well able to patronise them. But, unluckily for them, and in direct contravention of the saying, 'Hawks winna pike oot hawks' een,' the ex-owner of the station, formerly indeed an old acquaintance who had risen in life, displayed the most nefarious keenness in plotting an unscrupled treachery. He settled down, under the conditional purchase clause, section 13, upon the very best part of the run, the goodwill of which he had the day before been paid for. Having a large family, and the land laws having been recently altered so that a double area could be selected by each 'person,' he, with the Messrs. Freemans' own cash, actually annexed, irrevocably, an area which reduced the value of the grazing property by about one-third. Shrewd and unscrupulous as themselves, he calmly informed the frantic Freemans 'that he had only complied with the law.' He laughed at their accusations of bad faith. 'Every man for himself,' he retorted, adding that 'if all stories were true, they hadn't been very particular themselves, but had sat down on the cove's run that first helped 'em when they was bull-punchers without credit for a bag of flour.'

Rendered furious by this very original application of their own practice to the detriment of their own property, they wasted much of their—well—we must say, legally acquired gains in endless suits and actions for trespass against this most unprincipled free selector, and others who shortly followed his example. The lawyers came to know Freeman *versus* Downey as a *cause célèbre*. It is just possible that these brothers may come to comprehend, by individual suffering, the harassed

feeling which their action had, many a time and oft, tended to produce in others.

The later years of Mr. Neuchamp's life have been stated by himself to be only too well filled with prosperity and happiness as compared with his deserts. Those who know him are aware that he could not become an idler—either aimless or bored. He lives principally in Sydney. But if ever he finds a course of unmitigated town-life commencing to assail his nervous system, he runs off to a grazing station within easy rail, where he has long superintended the production of the prize short-horns, Herefords, and Devons necessary for the keeping up the supply of pure blood for his immense and distant herds. Here he revels in fresh air—the priceless sense of pure country life—and that absolute leisure and absolute freedom from interruption which the happiest paterfamilias rarely experiences in the home proper. Here Ernest Neuchamp builds up fresh stores of health, new reserves of animal spirits. Here Ernest probably thinks out those theories of perfected representative government in which, however, he fails at present to persuade an impatient, perhaps illogical, democracy to concur. His children are numerous, and all give promise, as, after a protracted and impartial consideration of their character, he is led to believe, of worthily carrying forward the temporarily modified but rarely relinquished hereditary tenets of his ancient House.

Time rolls on. The great city expanding beautifies the terraced slopes and gardened promontories of the glorious haven. Old Paul Frankston lies buried in no crowded cemetery, but in a rock-hewn family vault under giant araucarias, within sound of the wave he loved so well. Yet is Morahmee still celebrated for that unselfish, unrestricted hospitality to the stranger-guest which made Paul Frankston's name a synonym for general sympathy and readiest aid.

Assuredly Ernest Neuchamp, now one of the largest proprietors in Australia, both of pastoral and urban property, has not suffered the reputation to decline. He remembers too well the hearty open visage, the kindly voice, the ready cheer of him who was so true at need, so delicate in feeling, so stanch in deed. Succoured himself at the crisis of fortune and happiness, he has vowed to help all whose inexperience arouses a sympathetic memory. The opinion of a social leader and eminent pastoralist may be considered to have exceptional weight and value. However that may be, much of his time is taken up in honouring the numberless letters of introduction showered upon him from Britain. Young gentlemen arrive in scores who have been obligingly provided with these valuable documents by sanguine ex-colonists. By the bearers they were regarded as passports to an assured independence. Some of these youthful squires, with spurs unwon, need restraining from imprudence, others a gentle course of urging towards

effort and self-denial. But it has been noticed that the only occasions on which their respective guide, philosopher, and friend speaks with decision bordering on asperity, is when he exposes the fallacy of the reasoning upon which any ardent neophyte aspires to the position of A Colonial Reformer.

THE END

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